













# **INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS VERSUS THE BRITISH**

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**TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
ALLAN OCTAVIAN HUME  
CHARLES BRADLAUGH  
WILLIAM WEDDERBURN  
HENRY COTTON**



## Preface

FROM its rise to the meridian, and from meridian to sunset, the British empire in India presents a wide panorama of picturesque events involving generations of select men of a distant Western island and the teeming humanity of an Eastern subcontinent for a period of nearly two centuries. The empire, one of the largest and mightiest of political institutions in all history, rose to its fullness through chance and accident, through ambition, aspiration and adventure, through intrigue, conspiracy and diplomacy, and, through incessant and untiring effort for success. The time was on the side of the conquerors. Their conquest of India was only a manifestation of the decline of the East.

The object of every war is victory; that of victory is conquest; and that of conquest, preservation, so thought the French political thinker Montesquieu. The British fought battle after battle, and series of wars with Indian powers with the resolute object of victory. As victory after victory came to them in unbroken succession, territorial acquisition followed till at length India was possessed from end to end. Thereafter came the need for preservation. From Robert Clive to Winston Churchill, one of the supreme objectives of the British race was the preservation of the eastern possession, if not for all time to come, certainly for as long as the nation had the might to retain it. Only sixteen years before Britain had to bid good-bye to India, Churchill went on record to warn his countrymen: The loss of India would be final and fatal to us. It could not fail to be part of a process that would reduce us to the scab of a minor power.



The rulers were free to think as they pleased. But, the germs of self-destruction lay inherent in the body politic of political empires, especially, when they were the empires of one people established on another. The greater the British empire grew in size and strength more active became its self-destructive properties. Strangers as they were, and strangers as they remained, without the slightest possibility of their ever getting absorbed in the society of the ruled, the rulers decided to live in isolated cloisters, in their own small secluded communal existence, thereby widening for ever the gulf between themselves and the people. While that was the case, the props of the empire were seen to be visibly weak. The class of landed aristocrats which the East India Company fawned, and the princely order which the Crown consolidated were not equal to the gigantic task of supporting and perpetuating a huge foreign establishment. And, there was no Church in India to consecrate and sanctify either the oligarchs of the Company or the monarchs of the British throne for with divine validity of their rule. The high priests of the Hindu and Muhammedan communities were loath to venerate their white rulers or to ascribe to them the attributes of divinity. The empire thus lacked the divine sanction. When the British, for the ever growing needs of their vast administration, at last built an English-speaking Indian phalanx, that progressive body of men was seen breaking itself into three parts, those who wanted the Western knowledge for the sake of learning and got absorbed in the pursuit of the subjects of the humanities and sciences, those who regarded Western education as a sure means to Government employment for an economically secure career, and those, who, with that very education but without coming to be employed and be subservient to Government, lived a life of their own amid the growing miseries of their countrymen in a steadily dissolving economic structure. The first group contained in it men of light and learning, who, though small in number, were the regenerators of modern India; the second group nurtured within its ever growing number, with some exception, the loyal and faithful agents of the all-powerful Government; and the third group ultimately gave rise to the critics, the adversaries and the

rebels who, in the light of their political knowledge, came to regard the foreign rule as an anathema. All through the era of Indian nationalist awakening, one thing which forced the British statesmen into sober retrospection was the question whether it was wise on the part of their predecessors to have decided to modernise the Indian mind through Western consciousness!

So, too, the other destructive germs of the empire's own making gradually enlarged the cankers. The unity, of territory, of political, legal and administrative systems; the superimposition of educational and other uniformities over subcontinental variations; the scientific and technological innovations to conquer the time and distance in an otherwise stratified land with unchanging habits and static social characteristics; the new forms of mobility in internal trade and commerce in the wider needs of England's industrial revolution; and even, the ransacking of India's hoary past to explore the depth of her history, culture and contribution, all went against the supremacy of the empire though none of these could have either been escaped or avoided. When, therefore, the symptoms of resurgence became apparent to the rulers, the latter lamented for over sixty years the good work they had done, trying to derive consolation from the thought that the rebel India was their own creation, while at the same time, straining to utmost limits to apply a brake on India's natural and legitimate aspirations.

Right from the beginning the leading minds of Britain felt the necessity of enunciating the principles to justify their conquests, and for providing the moral validity to the basis of their empire. Edmund Burke, in criticising the conduct of his contemporary rulers in India in those initial days of the empire, wanted to civilise her future rulers with the rudimentary lesson that nothing would captivate the Oriental imagination more than the concept of justice and a sense of honour. To James Mill and his disciples, the rationale of their Eastern governance was the maximum good of an unconcerned population that required the bliss and benedictions of a benevolent Western despotism. In course of time, when the imperial hold became absolutely tight, the earlier philosophies got petrified

in an all-pervading institutionalised autocracy, strongly maintained and vigorously worked out by an efficient bureaucracy; most of the members of this school were patriotically devoted to the glory and greatness of the Britannic Majesty but generally indifferent to the conditions of a people whose destiny they came to play with. It is against this class that the new India reacted first; and that reaction persisted till the last. While defining ideal leadership in another context, Burke had said: A disposition to preserve, and an ability to improve, taken together, would be my standard of a statesman. There was no dearth of statesmen in the heyday of Britain's imperial authority. There were rare men among them who wanted both to preserve the empire as well as to improve its condition. But, when it came to the question of improvement in accordance with the will of the conscious section of the subject population, those very statesmen became timidly cautious, and remaining true to the principles of national conservatism, though some of them ventured into the role of reformers, the permanent bureaucracy raised tough barricades to thwart the desirable advance in progressive direction. And, if the reformer still could make his way, his concessions came only in dribblets to annoy the thirsty elite rather than satisfy it. Every reform proposal in British Indian history is a good example of a sordid academic exercise over one fundamental issue. If the builders of a mighty empire would ever allow the surface of their edifice to be eroded by doctrinaire winds blowing from the West! What the genius of a powerful Western race took a century to build should not be exposed to Western philosophies with harmful results, especially when those philosophies manifested through gross imitations by an Asiatic people.

The British Indian empire came to suffer from its own inner contradictions, the most positive of which was the contradiction between what the rulers professed politically and practised administratively. They professed India's welfare, and proudly propagated the numerous benefits which their rule had bestowed on her people, but their administration could not explain away the growing misery and the abysmal poverty of the people; nor could it justify the reasons for sacrificing India's economic interests for the prosperity of Britain,

They professed harmony and unity, justice and equity, but clearly widened the existing cleavage among various communities to undermine the growing national unity. They realised the growing consciousness of Indian people, generation by generation, for which their own rule was responsible, but they would not recognise the need for changes to keep pace with those changing times. In the long run, when the empire began to sink, it was not sinking like the Mughal empire under the weight of its own growth, because of the vices of its own ministers, because of internecine wars, because of military weaknesses, and because of a chain of weak rulers who could not preserve the empire from the onslaughts of the Marathas, the Sikhs and others, and similar medieval conditions, but because of other reasons of a more intense nature. For the British, the size of their empire was of no concern because of the modern means of communication; their military strength grew more and more formidable year by year; their ministers and political parties were dutifully devoted to the cause of the empire at all times; and, there was no fear of an armed threat from any of the six hundred princes or from other martial races. In fact, the British empire was invincible in strength and capacity and its leaders more organised than at any time before when the sun of their empire set. The decline and fall of the British empire was partly due to its own political heritage, partly due to its inherent defects, and mainly due to the inexorable forces of modern times of which nationalism and liberalism were the two great by-products.

The growth of Indian nationalism signified the decline of the British empire, and India's struggle for independence was symptomatic, in a wider perspective, of the general Afro-Asian resurgence. That historic struggle was conducted by the Indian National Congress, one of the most remarkable political organisations known to any country.

The one hundred and ninety years which constitute the annals of British India can be divided into three broad divisions of little over sixty years each. The first period runs from Robert Clive's success at Plassey to the final destruction of the Maratha powers by Lord Hastings when the greater mass

of India was brought under the British occupation. From the fall of the Marathas to the rise of the National Congress, it was a period of consolidation through the eras of Bentinck, Dalhousie, Canning, and Ripon. It was in that period that the Revolt of 1857 came and passed and the Company yielded place to the Crown. From the rise of the National Congress to the independence of India marked the third and the final phase which saw the decline and fall of the British empire.

The Indian National Congress defies clarity in many respects. But there is no doubt that it rose equal to the task of standing against the most formidable foreign power in modern world. From prayer, petition and protest, to confrontation, agitation, and revolution, the Congress advanced steadily and surely, bravely upholding national ideals, adapting them to suit different times. It was indeed a unique struggle between the rulers of a great empire who regarded their imperial mandate to rule India as an inscrutable decree of the providence, and the representatives of a great ancient land who did not compromise with the claims of the rulers. As the story developed, resistance to Congress policies led to resistance to government policies, and in their sequences and consequences, through actions and interactions, of causes and effects, the history of the six decades before Indian independence became significantly enough an account of the Congress versus the British. The National Congress began with the finest maxims of civilised conduct, as could be expected by the ruling authorities of a political party in opposition. Evolution of rights, rather than rights by revolution, was the guideline for the Congress leadership for more than a decade. As M.G. Ranade visualised the Congress policies, he extolled the values of moderation which implied the belief of never vainly aspiring for the impossible or for too remote ideals but striving each day to take the next step in order of natural growth, by doing the work that lay nearest to the hand in a spirit of compromise and fairness. Since response from the British side to this line of approach did not come in the manner it was expected, there naturally arose the Tilak-Aurobindo line of reaction that a subject nation does not prepare itself by gradual progress towards liberty,

it opens by liberty its way to progress. Through the passing of years the Congress developed its comprehensiveness while making its goal clearer and brighter from the indistinct ideals of its earlier years. The dream of Swaraj, Self-Government, or Home Rule dissolved at length in the longing for complete independence as the Congress continued its march through hopes and despair, through constitutional and revolutionary courses, amid the dust and mist of political uncertainties.

The Congress defied definition in regard to its composition. The line of separation between known congressmen and unknown congressmen could never be precisely drawn at any time. The regular members of the party or the recognised Congresswallahs were as much activists as the unnamed men without any recognised badge, dress or cap. That was a problem for the British. The maharajas and rajas sent donations to Congress funds secretly, the landlords instigated boycott movements openly, the Government servants in lower ranks attended Congress meetings either openly or secretly and collected funds for the Congress or read its literature, and the mendicants and beggars went from door to door in remote rural villages singing Congress Swadeshi songs fearlessly. Yet, none of these were ever Congressmen. It is the supporters and sympathisers of the Congress, who working in their elusive capacity made the Congress workers more fortitudinous. An emotional patriotic feeling which the Congress was able to inspire in the mind of the people brought nearer its fold people of all sections and it is mostly at the fringe that they worked when the directives came from the core. The strength of the Congress lay in its mass appeal, and nationalism, having transcended the barriers of class, caste and creed, lent to that body a massive hydra-headed appearance which finally acquired its unfathomable character when Gandhi came to provide leadership.

The Congress leadership, too, presented a nebulous character. Since 1885, the brave bands of nationalists and patriotic thinkers who made their pilgrimage to annual Congress sessions from all corners of India came from different sections of the population. The top men in the hierarchy were well-known among the politically conscious everywhere. But,

as the Congress band-wagon began to roll forward, some of the great individuals who guided the organisation appeared quite enigmatical to their followers as far as their own personal convictions were concerned. Ideologies differed and personalities clashed. Nationalism carried different meaning to different minds. The goals appeared different and so too, the means to achieve those goals. Splits occurred. Unity, too, could be restored. The radicals of today turned conservatives of tomorrow. Even, the lure of position and honour coming as it did from the highest places of authority dazzled the attention of a few. Some became the lost leaders, while others became more determined. Through the methods of trial and error, some liked to come nearer to the British while others drifted farther and farther. Through all this strain and stress, a majority of the Congress elders, however, presented three bright aspects of their organisation; first, they developed an internal democracy, of free expression of individual will, and secondly, they rose above sectarian and parochial considerations to think only in terms of national interests keeping the cause of the entire people in view, and finally, both by precept and by example, they tried to win the confidence of the people as men of honour and virtue. For the first thirty-five years of its life, the Congress saw great many leaders of almost equal stature, respectful towards each other even in differences, and some of them, in going out or coming back, only expressed their own determination, without demonstrating any spirit of apathy or hostility towards the organisation as such. That was the state of leadership till, under exceptional circumstances, Gandhi's personality came to be superimposed on the Congress and the organisation headed towards revolution with its moral discipline. Eminent Indians who did not join the Congress movement, and also those who dropped out for reasons of their own, worked on their own principles in the context of new political developments, the complexities of which reflected the grave character of the Indian national movement. The mainstream of the Congress movement, however, flowed on towards its destined end.

Did the Congress take an unusually long time to oust the British? The rulers of empire in the first half of the twentieth

century did not know how to liquidate their precious possessions without resolute resistance till the very last hour. So, if the Congress took a longer time to complete its work, it was because of the British determination not to leave India to Indian hands. Moreover, the makers of the Indian revolution in their conscious and subconscious appreciation of the size of India's population and the complex nature of its would-be democracy, had to dedicate their efforts to lift the nation to the level of a higher political consciousness, phase by phase, through insurrection and intermission, even if several years rolled by in that all-pervasive endeavour. Finally, towards the last years of the freedom struggle, the National Congress was facing not merely the Government of Great Britain in its last desperate stand, but also its internal rival, the All-India Muslim League which in its religio-communal obscurantism darkened the political horizon and alarmed the nation. After everything has been said, the Gandhian movement for twenty-seven years might yet be regarded as too long an exercise, particularly when the background had been prepared in the previous thirty-five years. Had the British agreed to abdicate their authority a decade earlier, there would have been perhaps no partition of India. And, if they had delayed so long, they could have possibly delayed by another year or so when, the Muslim League, without Muhammad Ali Jinnah, might have perhaps come around to reconsider its stand over the demand for Pakistan after the white-heat of communal frenzy had subsided for good. But these 'ifs' and 'buts' are only irresponsible suppositions having no relevance to the course of events which the forces of circumstances brought forward. There could be yet another 'if'!

The National Congress for the first thirty-five years moved on constitutional lines, and for the rest of its struggle, though it adopted revolutionary methods, followed the Gandhian creed of rigid non-violence. Could there have been appeals to armed insurrections when patriotic youth in every generation wanted to offer blood for the liberation of their country? The Revolt of 1857 had almost ended the British rule in months! India of the twentieth century could have presented a better performance and brought independence earlier. All



through India's political upheaval the British were afraid of the young revolutionaries, the anarchists and the terrorists who demoralised the police, the administration and the loyal supporters of the Government. Simultaneously, they were ever alert against the spread of revolutionary doctrines which could influence the sensitive portions of the Indian Army, since the Army was not inured to the symptoms of patriotic convulsion. The Congress created worries for the Government, but the anarchists posited real problems. A handful of whitemen, scattered over a subcontinent, could not have long resisted the anarchist attacks if they came wave after wave, and independence could have come earlier than it really did. This again is a surmise resulting from the pleasure of indulgence in hindsight, unmindful of the spirit of the time and the spirit of the people who shaped the course of history in an inevitable process. Gandhi might have unarmed thousands of brave anarchists so that he could bring to the battle-field millions of common men and women, who in their morbid existence, represented the real face of Mother India. Independence had to come for them, no matter how belated.

All these points in Introduction are mere over-simplification of the issues.

The purpose of this study "Indian National Congress versus the British" is to present a factual analysis of how an all-powerful Government and a national political party fought their elaborate battle over six decades of time. The facts as acquired from original sources have been reproduced in their order of sequence. The writer's freedom is limited to the arrangement of the narrative as objectively as possible without advancing arguments, propositions, surmises, or even hypothetical conclusions. Let the facts speak for themselves, and let the writer be free only to join the facts with hyphens and thread the continuity of the theme. It is only at places where it is necessary to advance the subject that an opinion is given, of course, with evidence to support it. Secondary sources and books of other authors on the subject have been scrupulously avoided while studying the original material or writing out the chapters in order to shut out their influence as well as to prevent already established ideas.

The work is full of defects. It has not been attempted to make it attractive and readable, since the writer is incompetent to take on that difficult art. The work is monotonous and repetitive. It lacks style and coherence. Similar ideas and accounts of similar events are reproduced in an iterative manner for which the readers will have no patience, and the critics will find enough reason to criticise. The aim has been, however, to allow the narration to run through evidences so that clarity comes to otherwise controversial problems or hitherto neglected points. If repetitions impair the thesis, the cause rests at the door of the British and the Congress who repeated their ideas and arguments over generations.

In completing this work I am greatly indebted to Dr. Satish Chandra, the Chairman of the University Grants Commission, for the help and encouragement he was pleased to render. I am obliged to the authorities of the British Council for the invitation they extended to me and arrangements they made for my work at the several archives of the United Kingdom. I owe my thanks also to Miss Patricia Beare for having arranged for me a series of fruitful interviews with distinguished British historians like Sir Cyril Henry Philips and Professor K.A. Ballhatchet and eminent figures connected with India's independence as Lord Louis Mountbatten.

I am dedicating this book to the memory of Allan Octavian Hume, Charles Bradlaugh, William Wedderburn and Henry Cotton, who, in their sympathy for the people of India, stood up against their own countrymen with courage and equanimity, and while suffering criticism and censure, brought confidence and strength to the mind of the early pioneers of the Indian National Congress in their march towards a distant difficult goal.

Bhubaneswar

—M. N. Das

December 1, 1977



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**Charles Bradlaugh**

**Hume, Dadabhai, and Wedderburn**

**Woomesh Chandra Bonnerjee**

**Pherozechah Mehta**

**William Wedderburn**

**Henry Cotton**

**Gopal Krishna Gokhale**

**Bal Gangadhar Tilak**

**Lord Curzon**

**Annie Besant**

**Madan Mohan Malaviya**

**John Morley**

**Lord Minto**

**Lord Hardinge**



# Abbreviations

All-India Muslim League	ML
British House of Commons	Commons
British House of Lords	Lords
British Museum Library	BML
Chelmsford Papers	CP
Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi	CW
Congress Cyclopaedia	CC
Dufferin Collection	DC
Gladstone Papers	GP
Hamilton Collection	HC
Hardinge Papers	HP
Indian National Congress	INC
India Office Library and Records	IOL
Lansdowne Papers	LP
Minto Papers	MTP
Correspondence with persons in England and Abroad	Correspondence Eng. & Ab.
Correspondence with persons in India	Correspondence
Letters and Telegrams	L & T
Montagu-Chelmsford Correspondence	MCC
Montagu's Travel Accounts	MTA
Morley Papers	MRP
National Archives of India	NAI
Northbrook Correspondence	NC
Parliamentary Papers	PP
Ripon Papers	RP
Scottish Record Office	SRO
Select Documents on History of India and Pakistan: 1858-1947 (Ed. C.H. Philips)	SD





## Pax Britannica in Indian Empire

THE British conquered India not in a day, but in a century. From Plassey to Punjab, Robert Clive to Marquis of Dalhousie, it was a century of protracted warfare when piece by piece an imperial edifice was raised from its foundation till the political domain of the English East India Company reached the geographical frontiers of the Indian subcontinent. There were no doubt intervals of peace, but conquests were considered more essential than internal prosperity, and, the servants of the Company in India, as well as their masters in England were one in their ambition to make their empire one of the greatest in history. They did succeed. The last conqueror on behalf of the Company was proud enough to say in 1850:

“On 2nd January I left Mooltan, in sight of the Soliman mountains bounding India on the west; on 2nd March I reached Moulmein, and saw from it the mountains of Burmah, which bound the Indian Empire on the east. It is a wide span, and I question whether any one . . . has ever swayed his power between such far removed limits, or has been called by his duty to so gigantic a journey of inspection.”<sup>1</sup>

But Britain was yet to claim guaranteed peace. The Rising of 1857 came like a severe tremor which was about to destroy

1. *Private Letters of Dalhousie*, Dalhousie to Couper, 4 March 1850.

the entire structure so assiduously built. It passed out, of course, all too quickly. But, to those Englishmen who suffered its impact, the suppression of the so-called Mutiny was like the re-conquest of India. Re-conquest indeed it was, and 1857 proved how shaky could be the work of a century!

For statesmen in England it became imperative to develop a new approach towards the Indian empire. They ended the rule of the Company in order to begin the rule of the Crown. The former was associated with wars and conquests, its last savage act being the suppression of the Mutiny. The Crown hoped to begin its rule with clemency towards the people and conciliation with the princes. The new policy showed propitious signs of a good future. Within the next few years the stories of 1857 more or less faded into the limbo of history. There was no fear of an internal revolution. The loyalty of numerous princes to the Queen of England settled down to mythical traditions of submission and surrender to a superior power for peace, security and safety; while people in their millions, in awe and wonder, and in resolute oriental faith, felt the omnipotence of a remote sovereign, as a providential dispensation. Pax-Britannica in Indian empire was at last a reality.

Looking at a quiet and tranquil empire, twenty years after 1857, Benjamin Disraeli dreamt of an age of the Roman Antonines in the history of India, with the happiness of mankind completely assured. The Antonines were emperors. Disraeli made Victoria an empress. "It is desired in India. It is anxiously expected. The Princes and nations of India . . . look to it with the utmost interest. They know exactly what it means," declared the Prime Minister.<sup>2</sup> The new title of the Queen was proclaimed on 1 January 1877 in a grand *Durbar* at Delhi. The Queen-Empress was made a symbol of determination to cherish India.

By the time the Crown's prestige was being elaborated, it was easy for the British Cabinet to look at India more closely. The empire was no longer widely separated as in good old days. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 cut down the

2. PP, Commons, Disraeli's speech on the Royal Titles Bill, 9 March 1876.

distance between England and India. Only a year earlier there was laid the overland cable, and a year later, the submarine cable. Those developments inspired greater confidence in the minds of India's rulers to hold the empire more tightly than ever before.

And, India was within the sphere of knowledge of most members of British political parties and of Parliament who were all conscious of imperial interests. A generation before Disraeli, Sir Robert Peel anticipated the future British interest in Indian affairs in view of scientific developments in the West in matters of means of communication, such as, steamship, telecommunication and modern Press. Peel had written to Ellenborough in 1843:

"The rapid communication between India and this country is making, and will continue to make, a most important practical change in the treatment of Indian questions in Parliament. It will provoke constant discussion by the Press and that discussion will increase the tendencies in Parliament to make India and Indian subjects the arena for political debate. It is difficult to foresee the effect of this, and of its influence on the Indian Press and the reaction of that Press on Newspapers and parties at home."<sup>3</sup>

By the time of Disraeli and Gladstone, parliamentary scrutiny, questions, and motions regarding Indian subjects were a routine affair. Amid those exercises, however, one thing was evident and clear. Irrespective of political ideologies or party differences, Parliament was concerned with the preservation of the peaceful character of its eastern possession as best as possible. In the seventies and eighties of the nineteenth century the internal tranquillity of India was as much a matter of satisfaction to the two great parties as it was their obvious responsibility to maintain it by all means and at any cost. In India, it was for the British officers to work as the custodians of that peace. They knew their mission, and were happy with their duties. That happiness was of course disturbed at times by the policy makers at the top who talked of innovations. India was full of anomalies. When a Viceroy like Ripon thought of

3. Add. Mss. 40471, 318-19, Peel to Ellenborough, 6 June 1843.

removing some, it appeared as if he was thinking of removing Englishmen from their Indian thrones. Talk of local government or of education filled many Englishmen with apprehension. They knew the character of the British rule as absolute, founded not on consent, but on conquest. They wanted to imply 'at every point the superiority of the conquering race, of their ideas, their institutions, their opinions, and their principles'. That superiority was itself the supreme justification of their existence.<sup>4</sup> Any reflection on that superiority invited from them critical reaction. Peace, order, the supremacy of law, the prevention of crime, the redress of wrong, the enforcement of contracts, the development and concentration of the military force, the collection and expenditure of revenue, and the construction of public works—were their major responsibilities. If those duties were discharged well, there was no need to invite further or newer burdens. The internal calmness was a reassuring factor both to those who were in charge of administration and to those who observed it from home. The fear was from outside.

That fear was mainly from Russia. Any aggression on the North-West Frontier was a matter of serious implications. The ruling statesmen, therefore, remained ever alert to guard against it. Disraeli's object was 'to occupy a strong strategical position upon the Frontier' and to carry the Indian railways to it for speedy movement of troops. When he fell from power in 1880, the Quetta Railway had been completed beyond Sibi. But Gladstone, who had pledged himself during the election campaign 'to reverse Lord Beaconsfield's policy in India' abandoned the project after coming to power.<sup>5</sup> Within four years, however, Gladstone's Government had to change its views. Orders were given for the recommencement of the work. The Government of India's scheme of frontier communications for strengthening the Indus valley line of defence at the cost of at least £5,000,000 was taken up for approval. The

4. *The Times*, see Letter from James Fitzjames Stephen, 1 March 1883. He was the Legal Member of the Supreme Council from 1869 to 1872.
5. PP, Commons, see E. Stanhope's charges against the Liberal Government, 21 May 1885.

Indian military authorities pressed for assured means of communication between the defensive points on the Indus valley and Pishin, and in addition to the railway to Quetta and Shibo, a military road from Pishin Plateau to Dera Ghazee Khan.<sup>6</sup> The Liberal Cabinet did not doubt that the protection of the frontier was as imperative a duty as administering the country, and some of the Conservatives utilised the situation to demonstrate the unanimity in Parliament in matters of Indian defence. They were determined, they said, to do all they could to protect their subjects. When the Ministry of William Ewart Gladstone resigned in June 1885, and the Ministry of the Marquis of Salisbury assumed power, the Secretary of State for India, Lord Randolph Churchill, at once moved forward with the scheme for the construction of the frontier lines, which, he said, "it was universally admitted were necessary for the security of their Indian empire."<sup>7</sup>

No government in Britain nor any political party could have failed to effectively meet the possibility of aggression from any external quarter. The Conservatives in that respect were a little more earnest. The Liberals, perhaps, were a little less so. But, Parliament on the whole maintained the required balance. When Gladstone was the Premier and Lord Dufferin the Viceroy of India, the reported Russian advances towards Afghanistan prompted fear in many minds. Though there were repeated declarations on behalf of Russia that 'Afghanistan is not within the sphere of her political influence' and there were positive assurances that there was nothing like a Russian advance against Herat, yet Parliament demanded a categorical assurance from the Government if it intended 'to maintain the absolute integrity of the Afghan territory from Russian occupation'. Gladstone assured: "The declarations of Her Majesty's Government and of other Governments on former occasions all remain in full force with respect to the Afghan territory."<sup>8</sup>

The mountains of Afghanistan and the dangerous frontier

6. PP, Commons, J.K. Cross, East India Loan Bill, 21 May 1885.

7. PP, Commons, Lord Randolph Churchill, East India Loan Bill, 6 July 1885.

8. PP, Commons, see Debates on 23 February 1885.

tribes stood against the British in their designs of invasion and conquest of that free country. To overcome this stiff resistance as well as to keep the Russian shadow away from Afghan territories, erection of strong positions over the frontiers, supported by internal military readiness, appeared the safest course. An aggressive military posture was also felt necessary for the security of the North-Eastern Frontier.

In these quarters, in Upper Burma, King Thibaw was considered dangerous to British imperial interests, not by virtue of his own power, but because of his collusion with the French. The colonial empire of France in the east was in a process of expansion towards Upper Burma through Cochin-China and Tonkin. The King was desirous of French friendship against the British. And, in 1885, under a commercial treaty, France prepared conditions for the Burmese Government to import arms.

The Indian Government was aware of the French intrigues and was ready for any eventuality. At last the developments ended in the British invasion of Upper Burma. By the close of 1885, Thibaw's power collapsed and soon thereafter, Upper Burma was annexed. But the conquest was followed by uneasy conditions which called for constant military operations.

Fears from beyond the frontiers, considered together with the vastness of the empire, called for adequate military preparations as well as potentials. Parliament knew that Britain's pride of peace rested on its army.

Policies of defence and protection which necessitated some wars and conquests indeed sustained peace in and stability and security of the empire. That was the bright side of the British rule. But the dark side of the Britannic peace cast its shadow heavily on the people. India suffered in silence the military policies of Great Britain. In some respects, those policies reflected a melancholic disregard for the Indian finances. The Indian army was used not merely to defend the frontiers of the empire, but to demonstrate the might of the British power at far-away places. The cost of those expeditions was met by India. In 1859, just after the transfer of power from the Company to the Crown, the Indian troops were employed outside the external frontiers in connection with the

China war. In 1867, a large expedition was sent to Abyssinia; in 1875, another expedition was sent to Perak; in 1878, considerable number of Indian troops were sent to Malta. That very year, Indian troops in large numbers were sent to Afghanistan to fight the Anglo-Afghan War. In 1882, an army expedition was sent to Egypt. Three years later, another expedition was sent to the Sudan. The practice continued. Parliament was aware of the impropriety of spending Indian revenues beyond the frontiers of India. But arguments were advanced to establish theories of Indian interests in different and distant parts of Asia and Africa. Some of those so-called interests were named as special interests.

Whether the Indian army was employed on the frontiers or across the seas, it was known to successive Governments of Britain that the Indian military charges were enormous. Whether the army was larger than necessary was a matter of opinion. The glaring fact was that much of the military needs of the whole British Empire were met from the Indian resources. For example, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, "India paid 24½ millions out of a total expenditure of 70 millions on the armaments of the empire. That was to say, India paid more than one-third of the total charges for the armaments of this immense British Empire, while the self-governing colonies only contributed an insignificant fraction of the whole expenditure."<sup>9</sup>

It was the financial burden on India which constituted one of the most difficult of the imperial problems. The crux of that problem again was the debt of India. It was mounting. To men like Randolph Churchill it was inevitable. When in 1886, the actual uncovered debt was calculated to be £60,000,000 he declared: "But to arrive at this figure the assets have been calculated at their full value, and that value can be maintained while our position in India is secured as a strong one. If you allow your political position to be weakened or demoralised your assets will undoubtedly suffer very greatly in value, and your Debt will soon mount up."<sup>10</sup> To cautious

9. PP, Commons, see Debate on Expenses of Troops in Africa in Aid of Egyptian Troops, 6 July 1896.

10. PP, Commons, Randolph Churchill, 21 June 1886.



politicians, the financial position of India caused grave anxiety. But others could readily find justifications in support of financial hardship. For example, as George Campbell said:

“All the events that have been happening of late on the North-Western Frontier on the one hand, and on the Burmese Frontier on the other, have necessitated a great increase in the Army. I have never been one of those who say—‘Oh! you must reduce your Army’. I have always been alive to the fact that ours is the smallest Army, having regard to the extent of the territory that it has to defend in the world; and I know that when you come into contact with an European Power on the one side and an Asiatic Power on the other you find it necessary to increase your Army. No doubt, our army is the most expensive in the world; but it is one of those things which England must expect to pay for.”<sup>11</sup>

Deficits in the Indian budget were no less alarming. In the year 1886, as Parliament was given to understand, the deficit stood at £2,800,000. The members sympathetic towards the people of India could not take it lightly since they knew of the people’s ‘extreme poverty’. The official accounts in respect of the Indian poverty were not always taken to be authentic by those who had any direct knowledge of the Indian conditions. One of the Members of Parliament, the Member for Flintshire, Samuel Smith, who was engaged in trading with India for the larger part of his life, and who had occasions to travel through different parts of the country, narrated the following account in 1886, after his latest visit:

“Sir Evelyn Baring,\* when Chancellor of the Exchequer for India, made a calculation as to the average income of the people of India, and he put it at 27 rupees per head, which, at the present rate of exchange, would be about £2 per head. But I am bound to say that, from the information I possess on the subject, that calculation appears to be an over-estimate . . .

11. PP, Commons, George Campbell, 21 June 1886.

\* Evelyn Baring was the Finance Minister in 1882. In his financial statement for that year, he said: “The tax-paying community in India was exceedingly poor, to derive any very large increase of revenue from so poor a population would be unjustifiable.”

The peasantry live at a permanent dead level of extreme poverty; they are scarcely half-clad; they eat very little food, and that of only the coarsest kind; and they are nearly all deeply in debt to the money lender—perhaps 90 per cent of them. It is difficult to conceive human life going on under more distressing conditions than it does over a great part of India.”<sup>12</sup>

The growing poverty was the result of many causes, one of them being the over-taxation of the people. It was said that throughout India there was great discontent with the amount of taxation, its nature, and the manner in which it was levied. The tax which stood out as the most oppressive and which excited the largest amount of odium was the Salt Tax. Towards the close of the nineteenth century, it was five times all over India compared to what it was at the beginning of the century. The tax itself was said to have amounted to 16 times the prime cost of production. The Land Tax, which was the most important source of revenue and the sheet-anchor of Indian finance, was unpopular because of the mode of assessment. Frequent raising of Land Tax in many parts of India proved ruinous to the prosperity of agriculture. The Government did not pay adequate attention to improve the method of cultivation. According to one estimate, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, there were about 190,000,000 acres under cultivation in British India, but it was doubtful if it produced on the average crops of the value of £1 an acre. By the last quarter of that century the people were almost wholly dependent on the land. The village industries of the former days were in decline. Many prosperous industries had closed down. India was flooded with cheap foreign goods. Agriculture alone could not feed the entire population. And, consequent upon the growing poverty, signs of disloyalty became manifest.

There was yet another subject to cause serious concern, namely, the increasing quantity of money which was being remitted from India to England every year. In 1887, R.T. Reid bluntly put it in the House of Commons that “the sum sent from India to England is £30,000,000 every year, without any equivalent being sent back.”<sup>13</sup> That annual drain was ‘the

12. PP, Commons, Samuel Smith, 21 June 1886.

13. PP, Commons, R.T. Reid, 9 September 1887,

tribute' not 'servile tribute' as some members liked to describe it. Whatever the name, the effect was the same.

In 1878, according to a return ordered by John Bright, the Indian Civil Service salaries were shown as £11,000,000. Within the next ten years or so, the amount increased by another two million pounds. Of that enormous amount, 80 per cent went to Europeans.<sup>14</sup> By the last decade of the century the Indian Pension List swelled to £6,000,000 of which about £4,250,000 was for Army pensions and furlough allowances. It was an enormous burden. According to one calculation, "the pensions of military officers in India come to more than double the whole pay of the Native Army of 145,000 men."<sup>15</sup> The sources of the flow were many and varied. The estimates were subject to debate, doubt, and dispute. But, in essence, all calculations pointed to one conclusion that there was a continuous drain of wealth from India.

In matters of internal administration, the Government of India as well as the British Cabinet felt the necessity of further extension of railways. In May 1885, the Secretary of State for India sought power "to borrow in the London market, if necessary, the sum of £10,000,000 within the next three years, charging the interest of this sum upon the Revenues of India."<sup>16</sup> The Government was not prepared to leave the construction to private companies as was done in other countries and therefore decided to resort to borrowing. It was argued that the investing public were not prepared to make up their mind to trust their money in private railway enterprises in India, whereas the Government considered it imperative "for the purpose of mitigating possible famine in certain districts and for the development of the country" that railway construction should be taken up urgently and pushed through somewhat more expeditiously than in previous years. Hence the need for loans.

By the year 1885, India possessed 10,832 miles of railway, the nominal invested capital of which stood at £144,500,000.

14. PP, Commons, see Debate on East India Revenue Accounts, 4 August 1891.

15. Ibid.

16. PP, Commons, J.K. Cross, 21 May 1885,

The gross earnings of those lines amounted to £16,097,200 a year, and the expenses to £8,026,000, or about 50 per cent; the net earnings being £8,071,000; the dividend on the broad gauge lines being 5.69 per cent, and on the narrow gauge lines 4.99 per cent. 65 million passengers travelled in railways during the year 1883-84, and nearly 28 million tons of merchandise was carried in that year.

New railway lines were indeed necessary. The Government considered the questions of frontier railways for safeguarding imperial interests besides the internal lines required for public interests. Besides the proposed loan of £10,000,000, huge sums were also necessary for those extra lines. For all those lines, useful or otherwise, the burden of interest was to be borne by the people. Criticism of this policy of raising loans and collecting interest on loans from the Indian tax-payers was not uncommon. As Arthur O'Connor put it:

“The people of India would be quite justified in opposing this proposal with all their force seeing that guaranteeing funds for the construction of railways in India, when those lines were not likely to prove remunerative or profitable, was a most unfair mode of proceeding towards the unfortunate Native tax-payer for the benefit of the British capitalist . . . Enormous sums were already taken away from India every year for the purpose of paying interest on loans which had been expended in the construction of railways which were unprofitable. A larger revenue was derived from the Salt Tax now than it yielded some years ago . . . The Customs Duties had been lowered for the benefit of Manchester; while the Excise Duties, which pressed so heavily upon India, had been raised. In fact, the people of India were ground down by a system of taxation more searching and distressing than probably any other financial system in vogue. Yet they were now asked to vote £10,000,000 for these railways, which would never benefit the people of India at all.”<sup>17</sup>

Referring to further expenses suggested for frontier lines, he said: “If the Russians and the British were at rivalry in Central

17. PP, Commons, Arthur O'Connor, 21 May 1885,

Asia, that was not the fault of the Indians.”<sup>18</sup>

British Parliament was fully aware of the growing poverty of India. The factors responsible for that poverty were also known to those members who took some interest in Indian affairs. Through trade or tribute, defence expenditure or interest on investments, Britain's financial benefits were an open secret. Some felt apprehensive if the perennial drain would lead to grave consequences. Others were inclined to believe that the flow of wealth from the empire, however objectionable, could neither be escaped nor avoided. The inevitability of every item of expenditure appeared a foregone conclusion in the context of financial relations between the two countries as shaped through the years.

Therefore, there was the need for finding justifiable arguments in support of the policies followed. Powerful sections in Parliament, belonging to opposite parties, upheld and developed a political doctrine in regard to the virtues of the British rule. The contents and purports of their arguments ran on same lines. Law and order, tranquility and peace were the fruits of British administration. India was happy and that happiness of a subject country should be a matter of gratification to the ruling people.

There were many stalwarts in Parliament to justify the fruits of the Britannic rule. As the empire was at its zenith during the eighties of the nineteenth century, pompous announcements regarding the virtues of British rule were frequently made whenever any matter concerning India came up for discussion. To quote J.M. Maclean, who spoke in 1886:

“Whatever fault may be found with the Administration of India I am sure we have in that country as fair and as just a Government as exists anywhere in the world, and we ought to remember Tennyson's words—

‘The gods are hard to reconcile,

‘It is hard to settle order once again’.

“India is one of the remaining portions of Her Majesty's Dominions in which the Queen's writ runs throughout the length and breadth of the land, in which security for the pro-

18. PP, Commons, Arthur O'Connor, 21 May 1885.

tection of life, liberty and property, is given to all without distinction, and in which every man knows that he can have justice impartially administered by the Courts of Law. We have also given to that country advantages of modern civilisation such as it never experienced before it came under our rule . . . The Empire of British India is the noblest monument that has ever been reared to the political and military genius of the English race . . .'<sup>19</sup>

His chief apprehension, however, was, that the administrators could overdo their despotism. It was known to intelligent persons that in the name of benevolent despotism, the British Indian bureaucracy tended to become tough and unimaginative. It was Bright who, long before he became a Liberal Unionist, had once said: "India has now become the pasture-ground for smart young English gentlemen." In view of unfortunate attitudes of many young officers, some criticism of their administration in the British House of Commons was considered necessary for 'a wholesome and purifying effect on Indian affairs'. The sweetening influence of English criticism, so it was said, had the merit that it inspired the Government in India with sympathy for the millions whom they ruled. At least that was what some Members of Parliament thought.

Some others were only too eager to point to the prosperity of India in the midst of known adversities. Particularly, that line of thought was an obvious line of defence for any party in power. To give an example, the Under Secretary of State for India, John Gorst, said in 1889:

"The prosperity of India is so great, the welfare of the people is advancing so rapidly, and everything in India at the present time is so prosperous, that if this House would look nearer home, and would endeavour to make some other provinces of the Empire as quiet and as orderly as India, perhaps the time of Parliament would be better occupied."<sup>20</sup>

How far were such assessments correct, it was for others to consider and believe. But at the very time when the Under Secretary of State described so eloquently the prosperity of

19. PP. Commons, J.M. Maclean, 21 June 1886.

20. PP. Commons, John Gorst, 22 February 1889.

India, the attention of the Secretary of State for India was being drawn to the report of a district collector from the prosperous area of Diamond Harbour in the fertile province of Bengal about the imprisonment of nine starving men and fines on a starving woman "for a breach of the Revenue Laws, they having scraped some salt from the earth to add to their meal of tamarind seeds and stalks of the water-lily."<sup>21</sup> There, too, was famine at that time in Ganjam and Orissa.

The concept of Indian prosperity was so subjective in nature that its interpretation very often defied clarity or meaning. Many Conservatives in Parliament went by the faith that famines did not prove the people's misery. They came as natural calamities, brought untold suffering, and took a heavy toll of life no doubt; but they were neither the making of the governments, nor testimonies to government's failure. The general poverty was similarly interpreted as the natural outcome of many factors with which the Indian Government had no concern. Peace in poverty was itself prosperity. A classic example of such argument frequently came from a noted Conservative, Richard Temple. "Well, I do not deny that there is misery in India," he said, "but it is nothing like the misery you have in London or in any centre in Europe or across the Atlantic. From my personal knowledge of India I can affirm that there is no country in the world, civilised or uncivilised, where there is so little misery—apart altogether from the cases of famine—as India. And those cases have served to bring into action some of the most humane and beneficent exertions in the annals of mankind."<sup>22</sup> The imperishable record of the British rule in India was ever a source of inspiration to the hard core of Englishmen who gloried in their achievements of conquests and consolidation. The empire was great in many respects. Its prospects were bright. In self-confidence of its rulers lay its future stability. To quote Richard Temple again, and in some length:

"We should speak of India with triumph instead of complaining. Instead of talking of the sorrows of the people of

21. PP, Lords, Lord Stanley of Alderley to Secretary of State for India, Viscount Cross, 1 August 1889.

22. PP, Commons, Richard Temple, 2 August 1889.

India I would rather talk of their happiness—a happiness unknown in their previous history. The people are growing in numbers, and their agricultural and trade are spreading. Their moral, social and intellectual status is rising rapidly every year, under the beneficent influence of the civilisation which we are introducing into the country . . . There (on the Frontier) we behold the possible battlefield between the Russian invader and the British defender. On that dread day the value of this costly frontier defence will be tested. I trust that the defence will answer that extreme test, and that the invader will be defeated, never to return. Then, after that crowing victory, a cry of joy and thanks will arise to heaven from the whole earth of India. The native Princes will rejoice to see the triumph of that British suzerain that protects their territories. The old man will be glad when he remembers the ancestral stories of the revolutions stopped by that benign power that preserved the *Pax Britannica*. The thoughtful man will be thankful who reflects on the moral and material blessings we have showered on his country. The poor man will be grateful for the victory of that power that guards his crops from devastation, his home from plunder, his family from captivity. And all classes, rich and poor, will unite in a chorus of thanks-giving for the safety of the Government whose force rests not only on India itself, but also on a distant basis beyond the sea, on the land of the free and the brave, on the moral strength of Western opinion, and on the confidence of that Parliament which is the centre of Imperial authority and holds the keys of the Eastern Empire.”<sup>23</sup>

The thesis of Richard Temple carried conviction with many as regard to the bliss of the British rule. Some sceptics, however, continued to think if there was the need for an evaluation of the value itself. The doubt centered round the same old story that ‘from generation to generation the Indians have been odiously, mercilessly, and villainously robbed’. The persons who were subjected to that extortion numbered 270 million, they inhabited a country many times larger than Great Britain, a country as large as Europe with the sole exception of Russia.

23. PP, Commons, Richard Temple, 27 August 1889.



It was said that out of those 270 million, there were no fewer than 40 million who never knew what it was to have a satisfying meal and that they lived on one meal a day. The Government did almost nothing to halt the growth of poverty. Irrigation works were not undertaken. Improvement of cultivation was out of consideration. Railways were constructed for development of communication, but it was computed that out of every shilling spent in railway enterprise, 8 d. made way to England. The bureaucracy in India remained cut off from the people because of racial barriers. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, out of 2,357 appointments in the higher Uncovenanted Service, natives of India held only 188. The effect of a system like that on the revenues of India was said to have been enormous, besides the fact that the highly paid Europeans understood less of the Indian problems.

It may be mentioned here that notwithstanding the promises contained in the Act of Parliament of 1833 that no native of the territory of India, nor any natural-born subject, should, by reason only of his religion, etc., be disabled from holding any place in the Government, 'every office, every emolument worth having in India' was given to Englishmen. By 1885, according to one version, the number of members of the Civil Service was 900, and only 9 of them were Indians. The Government version, however, contained that "In January, 1888, the number of superior officers of the Indian Civil Administration was 964 Europeans to 59 Natives."<sup>24</sup> It was through a slow and reluctant process that the doors of the British Indian Courts and of the Covenanted Civil Service were being opened to Indians. But, the problems of administration multiplied so rapidly that, whether European or Indian, the administrators as a class found themselves in extreme difficulty in meeting the genuine grievances of the common people.

The famines in the meantime visited frequently. In Europe as statistics showed, the loss of life from wars from 1793 to 1887 was 4,500,000; whereas, the loss of life from famines in India from 1802 to 1879 was no fewer than 14,000,000.

24. PP, Commons, see Debate on the Queen's Address, 12 February 1892.

According to another estimate, the mortality was much higher. During the 30 years, 1848 to 1878, the total reduction of the population through famine was said to have been nearly 20 millions.<sup>25</sup>

There were yet further stories of woes. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, opium consumption in India was growing rapidly. Those who disliked the opium policy of the Government, like Canon Wilberforce, pointed out that "the opium was prepared in double strength in order to poison our Indian fellow subjects." It was pointed out in 1890 that the Government had diverted 500,000 acres of the best land in India from the growth of cereals to the growth of opium for the purpose of revenue. The opium dens were increasing in number every year, because they also meant a source of revenue to Government. The number of those dens in British India by 1890 was more than ten thousand.

Pointing to the many abuses of the British rule, one of its Members, MacNeill, reminded the British House of Commons:

"You gained India by what I would call successful Pigottism. You got it by murder and by fraud. Are you going to keep it by demoralisation and starvation? You may do so for some time, but the people of India will soon become alive to their own interests, and will seek to govern themselves according to their own principles and for their own land."<sup>26</sup>

Such were the faces of the Britannic Peace. It was peace amid poverty. In deep dark nights, over countless villages in the far-away Indian countryside, the shouts of the *chawkidar* reminded the millions in their bed that the sovereign authority was wide-awake while the people slept. The red turbaned policemen in towns, cities and police stations struck terror in the heart of the high and the low alike as the custodians of law and order. The rare and remote Whitemen, sitting in majestic silence in offices of judges and magistrates in cities and towns, represented the splendour and might of a government that existed to rule. And the effigy of the Sovereign on the solid silver and copper coins moved from Hindukush to Burma and

25. RP, Add. Mss. 43615, Report of George Couper, 24 June 1881.

26. PP, Commons, MacNeill, 14 August 1890.

the Himalayas to Cape Comorin to proclaim the stability of an economic system to those who had the means to handle them. But, yet there was no end to the suffering of the people, a suffering which they believed was due to their fate.

The peace of silence which prevailed for twenty years after the Rising of 1857 grew into an uneasy calm as the nineteenth century progressed into its last quarter. There was turmoil in the minds of the educated Indians. Unhappy opinions gradually got avenues for expression. Vernacular languages were many in number. And, in each language there were many newspapers. It was difficult for Englishmen to ascertain the contents of all that the vernacular Press printed. There were subtle, intricate, and indirect ways of writing things to prove unintelligible to foreigners while carrying deeper meanings to the sons of the soil. The English Press also raised its voice at times on behalf of the people. For the higher intellectual circle the Press slowly appeared as a vehicle of public opinion. Even as early as the thirties of the century, when the Indian Press was only in its inception, Lord William Bentinck had acknowledged that "he had derived more information from the Indian Press than from all the Councils, all the Boards, and all the Secretaries" by whom he was surrounded. Half a century separated Lord Lytton from Lord Bentinck. The role of the Press during that interval had grown manifold. On its positive side, what the Indian Press was in fact doing was vividly described by Robert Knight, the editor and owner of *The Statesman* in the seventies of the nineteenth century. In 1876, he wrote his views about the relation that then subsisted between the Government and the Press for the information of the ruling Viceroy, Lord Lytton. He pointed out:

"The Government of India is necessarily a despotism tempered only by the character of the men who administer it, their accountability to the House of Commons, and by the right of complete freedom of speech which has been accorded to the people. The State has conferred upon the people all the privileges of free man and, in the conscious integrity of its purpose, has conceded the right of free speech in every part of the empire. In doing this, the State seems to me to have placed in the hands of the newspaper Press a very responsible trust. It is

not the place of the newspapers, I think, to be courtiers to the Government, but to represent the interests of all classes. And there is no country in the world, perhaps, in which it is more important that the Press should discharge this duty. But there has been a tendency of late years to less cordiality between Government and the Press than ever existed, and I do not think that it has been the fault of the latter. The Government is less ready than it formerly was to avail itself of our help in the only way in which it can be given . . . To expect the Indian Press to be 'official' is, I think, to mistake its trust; while if we exclude loyal and well-informed criticism from its columns, we must not complain if they are filled with what is not loyal and is ill-formed . . .

"It seems to me that under the system of administration we have established in India, the only right conception of the office of the Press is that of Her Gracious Majesty's Opposition, and whether that opposition shall be well-informed and loyal or the reverse, depends wholly upon the relations established therewith by the Government."<sup>27</sup>

The Government was, in general, jealous of the Press as the Press was developing an attitude of hostility towards the Government. The culmination of that confrontation was seen in Lytton's Vernacular Press Act of 1878. "It is not without very considerable hesitation that I made up my mind to pass this Bill," wrote Lytton. "Although I can hardly doubt that the seditious utterances of the Vernacular Press are, at all times, more or less mischievous, yet I do not think, that, in ordinary times, the mischief done by them is sufficiently serious to call for interference in the only form which could render interference efficient, or to justify the shock likely to be given by such a measure, as the one we have passed to popular sentiment and traditions at home."<sup>28</sup> The Viceroy considered the time extraordinary because of developments outside the frontiers and for adverse reaction in India to British policies. People talked of the weakness and decline of the British Raj. The Press

27. SD, Robert Knight to Owen Burne, Private Secretary to Lord Lytton, 31 July 1876.

28. SD, Lord Lytton to Lord Northbrook, 25 April 1878.

spread stories on those lines and took delight in 'openly insulting and denouncing the whole British Power in all its manifestations'. So was the need for prompt, stringent and repressive legislation to take away the freedom of the Press.

Public opinion, however, could not be suppressed for long. The Press Act had to go under Lytton's successor, Ripon. The national consciousness which rapidly developed through the intellectual trends of the nineteenth century renaissance, finally paved the way for the birth of an all India national organisation during those finest hours of the British in India, that is, the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Lord Beaconsfield, at the height of his power, while speaking of the evacuation of Kandahar, ridiculed the idea of some timid people that the possession of one place or another was essential to the security of the Indian Empire. "The Key of India," he proudly proclaimed, "is not Herat or Kandahar. The Key of India is London. The majesty and sovereignty, the public spirit, and vigour of our Parliament; the ingenuity and determination of our people—these are the Keys of India."<sup>29</sup> Beaconsfield was dead when the National Congress was born. The determination of Parliament and of the English race to hold on to the Keys of India remained firm for years to come. But the peace and stability of the Britannic rule were rudely disturbed by the growth of an organisation which stood to challenge the very foundations on which the empire rested.

Were there no statesmen among the British to foresee that Indians would rise to a confrontation at an appropriate hour if the British continued to bask under the sunshine of complacency in their blindness to realities? Indeed there were. They were there in Parliament, in public life in England, on the viceregal throne in India, and in provincial headquarters. But they were only a handful in number. Their sporadic voices, raised incoherently and at intervals, were too faint to alarm any one. A few notable examples of such voices would show that Britannic peace had no absolute charm for all. It was, at best, only a crust on the live volcano of Indian discontent.

29. PP, Commons, Disraeli's words quoted by J.M. Maclean, 3 September 1895.

So, pointing to the disastrous attitude of the British Indian administrators towards their subjects that "We know what is best for you, and intend to do it; if you dislike it or disapprove it, that is your fault, not ours; we don't care", it was Allan Octavian Hume who warned Lord Northbrook 15 years after the Mutiny and 13 years before the birth of the Congress in the following words:

"Your Lordship can probably hardly realize the instability of our rule; but I, who have seen the whole grand apparatus of an highly civilized Government shrivel up in a single month over a vast country, far larger and more populous than Great Britain, like some pompous emblazoned scroll cast into a furnace, can never hide from myself, that whereas in those days (20 years ago, and even in the darkest times of the Mutiny) we had the active support of some and the passive countenance of a majority of our people rendering the comparatively rapid resuscitation of our rule possible, we have now between us and destruction nothing but the bayonets, sheathed it is true for the moment, and hung round by flowers of civilized thought, which may well lead the Sham-worshipping public to look upon it as moral strength, but for all that to those who look below the surface the 'Cold Steel' *und weiter nichts*.

"This great change in the spirit with which our subjects are animated towards us, I attribute mainly to the equally great change that has taken place in the spirit in which we have dealt with them—a change not only in the Council Chamber, but which has permeated every grade of the administration. A studied and invariable disregard, if not actually contempt for the opinions and feelings of our subjects, is at the present day the leading characteristic of our Government in every branch of the administration."<sup>30</sup>

The old loyalty was vanishing fast. In pre-Mutiny days or even in the worst days of the Mutiny itself, there were loyal friends of the British who stood by the foreigners through thick and thin. Among the British too, there were wise public servants who 'scrupulously respected the feelings and prejudices

30. NC, Mss. Eur. C 144/13, A.O. Hume to Lord Northbrook, 1 August 1872,

of the people' and handled most delicate questions with 'the greatest deliberation, caution and tenderness'. Those days of understanding could no longer be there in face of grim realities which the new educated class understood of an alien Government.

The most terrible of those realities, what H.M. Hyndman considered 'Our Greatest Danger in India', was a financial system which pointed to a 'hideous economical catastrophe'. After many years of study of Indian matters Hyndman was arriving at a conclusion which can be summed up in his following words:

"When poverty-smitten cultivators in one part of India are taxed—permanently taxed—to support famine-stricken ryots in another, who in their turn are to be taxed again for the like service, the whole country being drained all the while by enormous military charges, home charges, interest, remittances, and loss by exchange, it needs no great economist, no far-seeing statesman, to predict that a crash is inevitable."<sup>31</sup>

More painful than the economic malady was the apathy of the English officers towards its causes and consequences. Resentment against that apathy was inevitable and consequences to follow were ominous. When Florence Nightingale took up the issue and began to draw the attention of her countrymen to what was wrong with the British Indian administration, she was advised by Lord Northbrook to remember:

"While you have shown with much eloquence and force the strong sympathy which it is only like you that you should feel for the poor sufferers in the late famine, and for the indebted ryots of the Deccan, you have, I think, looked only at one side of the case, and you have used expressions which, I am convinced, are not just towards our countrymen, who have done and are doing what they believe to be their duty to the Indian people under great difficulties and which must have given them deep pain."<sup>32</sup>

31. H.M. Hyndman's papers in the *Nineteenth Century* published between 1878 and 1880. See Bibliography.

32. NC, Mss. Eur. C 144/7, Northbrook to Florence Nightingale, 1 September 1878.

But that redoubtable lady was not to be convinced. "I meekly accept your mild rebuke," she answered. "But I do not plead guilty to 'injustice towards our countrymen' 'doing their duty to the Indian people' so well.

"On the contrary, I am much more likely to idealize the '70,000' of 'our countrymen' in India as a band of heroes, patriots, and martyrs, only that they never stay there.

"And do you not think that one is justified in saying that 'we do not care for the people of India'. When not 20 men can be got together in the House of Commons who really know or care about this 'great dependency' which we prate and gabble about; when the Cabinet uniformly shirks Indian questions; when they never make an ex-Viceroy Secretary of State for India, and when, even in the India Office, the only thing the India Office does not want to hear about is—India. This is a proverb among Anglo-Indians returning home. But is not this partly or wholly their own fault?"<sup>33</sup>

The indictment of Nightingale was well-founded, though taken lightly by the ruling statesmen of the time. There were no effective media by which either the Englishmen in India could understand Indian feelings, or the Englishmen in England could know the real conditions in their distant empire. "The great Indian officials," asked Nightingale, "returning home—do they interest England about India? They do not go even the length of a Review article; they complain of the India Office, but in a country like England can you interest the India Office unless you interest the people of England?"<sup>34</sup>

Individuals such as Hyndman and Nightingale no doubt disturbed the tranquil minds at Whitehall or Westminster, but the latter satisfied themselves that the statistical information coming from those critics about Indian woes were 'very uncertain weapons'. For them the source of their worries was not the 'Life or Death in India', but the emerging educated class which felt free to criticise the administration in numerous local papers. It was not the poverty of the people, but the opinion of

33. NC, Mss. Eur. C 144/7, Florence Nightingale to Northbrook, 7 September 1878.

34. *Ibid.*



the few educated which indicated the coming confrontation.

During the ten years before the birth of the Indian National Congress the chief problem was how to control the Press. "I am afraid," said the Marquis of Salisbury to Northbrook in March 1875, "a mistake was made by Lord Macaulay and others in the direction they gave to educational efforts in India. Popular education would have enabled the millions to raise themselves a little out of their extreme poverty. The University education only manufactures a redundant supply of candidate for the liberal professions in a country where the demand is small, and as a by-product turns out a formidable array of seditious article-writers."<sup>35</sup> The ruling Viceroy to whom the above letter was addressed knew of the dangers arising out of opinions expressed in Press and thought of measures to eradicate that danger. "I think," he was subsequently assured by Salisbury, "newspapers make the task of constitutional government much easier than it would be otherwise by signalling hidden rocks, but in despotic governments they are an unmixed nuisance. I have a strong impression that you will have to increase your preventive power over them. Their present tone of habitual sedition cannot be free from danger."<sup>36</sup>

The Marquis of Salisbury was the Secretary of State for India. Since the Viceroy could not consider the time opportune enough to bring in a law against seditious newspapers, he had to wait. By the close of 1875 the name of the new Viceroy was announced, Lord Lytton, at that time Minister at Lisbon. To the Conservatives he was 'a man of considerable ability', a man to deliver the goods and not to discredit the choice. He came to India to celebrate the Delhi *Durbar* wherein the Queen of England was proclaimed Empress of India, to fight the Second Anglo-Afghan War, and to impose on India the Vernacular Press Act. The outgoing Viceroy congratulated his boss in considerable agony while yielding place to his successor. "I was glad to receive your telegram," said Northbrook to Salisbury, "saying you had announced my resignation . . . I shall be glad to be relieved from the task of carrying out a policy

35. NC, Mss. Eur. C 144/12, Salisbury to Northbrook, 25 March 1875,

36. Ibid, 21 May 1875.

(Afghan policy) to which I see grave objections.”<sup>37</sup>

Lytton's rule marked the Britannic peace at its zenith in the sense that Disraeli dreamt of the Roman grandeur in Indian empire at that very time (as indicated earlier). In another sense, however, it was a lull before the storm, a forced peace imposed with an iron hand, or free expression silenced by arbitrary laws. Lytton, by trying to stop the criticism of administrative actions, drove the educated Indians into a hostile camp from where they looked towards the British with a sense of resentment.

That Disraeli and Lytton followed wrong policies at a difficult time was apparent to their immediate successors in office, Gladstone and Ripon. Extreme conservatism did not fit in well with the temper of the Indian elite. The latter wanted recognition of their worth as well as a voice in the administration of their country.

Ripon approached nearest to their aspiration. His viceroyalty from 1880 to 1884 formed a milestone in history. He showed the greatest prudence in appreciating the signs of the times and endeavoured his best to win over the subject race by giving them confidence and showing them respect. But, as his liberalism crashed on bureaucratic conservatism, an unexpected confrontation between the ruling race and the ruled speedily brought to surface a political crisis of deeper consequences. Two works of Ripon hastened India's political awakening. His measures on 'Local Self-Government' created a hope in the minds of the educated Indians that they should at last get a chance to manage their local affairs. His 'Ilbert Bill' created a situation by which the people of India demonstrated openly and boldly their hatred of the European race.

"We are entering," reminded Ripon to Gladstone in 1882 while describing the need of local self-government, "or rather we have entered, upon a period of change in India; the spread of education, the substitution of legal for discretionary administration, the progress of railways, telegraphs, etc. are now beginning to produce a marked effect upon the people; new ideas are springing up; new aspirations are being called out;

37. NC, Mss. Eur. C 144/12, Northbrook to Salisbury. 7 January 1876.

and a process has begun which will go on with increasing rapidity and force from year to year. Such a condition of affairs is one in which the task of government, and especially of practically despotic government, is beset with difficulties of no light kind; to move too fast is dangerous, but to lag behind is more dangerous still; and the problem is how to deal with this new-born spirit of progress, raw and superficial as in many respects it is, so as to direct it into a right course, and derive from it all the benefits which its development is capable of ultimately conferring upon the country, and at the same time to prevent it from becoming, through blind indifference, or stupid repression, a source of serious political danger.”<sup>38</sup>

As early as 1870 Lord Mayo's Government had put forth a Resolution which contained the rudiments of a policy which Ripon now wanted to advance, a policy which had been ‘smothered by official indifference or hostility’ till then. The same official hostility was thrown up again, while the Viceroy was surprised to see how the people in all the more advanced parts of the country received the offer with a sense of gratitude even if the boon was of a negligible character, namely, giving them only a small share of responsibility in management of their roads, drains and schools. If the official hostility was to wreck that feeling, what hopes were left for the educated regarding their role in a state? Yet, the hostility was apparent. Ripon was criticised as a ‘very alarming Radical’, and the Governor of Bombay, James Fergusson, issued a Resolution, quite unusual and unbecoming, reflecting upon the policy of the Government of India and misrepresenting that policy grossly. “It seems to me most probable,” wrote Ripon to Gladstone, “that this Resolution is intended for the consumption of his Conservative friends at home, and that, therefore, it is not at all impossible that the subject may be noticed in Parliament. If it is, I feel perfectly confident that I may rely fully upon your support . . . I need not point out to you how serious might be the political results of disappointing the hopes thus raised, and how inconsistent it would be with all the acknowledged aims of the

38. NC, Mss. Eur. C 144/2, Extract from a letter from Viceroy Ripon to W.E. Gladstone, 6 October 1882.

Liberal Party to do so.”<sup>39</sup>

India possessed men like James Fergusson among her administrators who would not allow even the reading of Macaulay's Essays on Clive and Warren Hastings in the schools of Bombay in the belief that they should lead the people to know that the conduct of British rulers in India had not always been perfectly immaculate! Such men being in majority, it was no easy job for Ripon to think of Indian progress. Local Self-Government, however, stayed, making headway slowly and precariously.

It was the Ilbert Bill which brought to surface the real crisis. The matter was simple. Till the time of Ripon it was only a European judge who could try a European British subject in India, not an Indian judge. Ripon wanted to remove this racial discrimination in the sphere of justice and in 1883, the Law Member of the Viceroy's Council, Ilbert, introduced a Bill to withdraw that specific European privilege. The Anglo-Indian community at once rose against the Government in all their might while despising Indians in strongest possible terms. “Would you like to live in a country,” asked Meredith Townshend to fellow Europeans, “where at any moment your wife would be liable to be sentenced on a false charge of slapping an *ayah* to three days' imprisonment, the magistrate being a copper-coloured pagan who probably worships the Linga, and certainly exults any opportunity of showing that he can insult white persons with impunity?” Such invectives proved how deep-rooted was the Englishman's hatred for his Indian subjects.

A nervous Viceroy, while sending his apologia, regretted that anything connected with his administration should be a source of trouble to Gladstone's Government in Parliament; but described how his countrymen used violent language to insult the people and kept up an agitation throughout Bengal and Assam and in other parts of India with great vigour. “I am convinced,” he said, “that the present furious opposition has not been created by this Bill alone—it is an opposition to the general tenor of my policy, at that policy of governing India

39. NC, Mss. Eur. C 144/2, Extract from a letter from Viceroy Ripon to W.E. Gladstone, 6 October 1882,

'for herself and not for England', still less for a limited number of Englishmen residing here . . .'<sup>40</sup>

Agitation did not subside. Ripon had no alternative but to think of modifying the Bill in order to satisfy the English vanity. But Indian opinion in the meantime had become equally critical and any retreat from the original step was sure to create bitterness and rancour. In a dilemma, he turned to the only Briton in India who understood the Indian feeling at that moment more genuinely than others for his sound advice. Ripon wrote to Allan Octavian Hume:

"The state of things at Calcutta is certainly very unpleasant. The feeling is very bitter and the personal hostility to myself extraordinary. A compromise has been offered . . . Please therefore telegraph to me immediately on receipt of this letter your opinion on the subject. If you think that the leaders of native opinion would acquiesce in such a settlement, telegraph 'Yes'; if you come to a contrary conclusion telegraph 'No' . . . As regards native meetings I am more convinced than ever that they ought to be avoided, such a meeting if held in Calcutta just now would in all probability lead to serious disorder. In your mountain retreat you can perhaps hardly imagine how electric the atmosphere is down here; but you know India so well as to be fully able to estimate the consequences of a disturbance in which lives might be lost on either side."<sup>41</sup>

From Simla, Hume telegraphed in reply 'No'. No concession would please the foreign community, not even the entire withdrawal of the Bill, he felt. "They would crow," he wrote, "to any extent, consider they had gained a great victory, and become hereafter utterly unmanageable, but they would be none the less hostile to you personally and to the policy you represent. The time has gone by when any possible concession would enable us to regain in any degree their confidence, respect, support . . .

"How long is the Viceroy and through him the Empress to be publicly insulted and outraged? . . . How long, how long is

40. GP, Add. Mss. 44287, Ripon to Gladstone, 24 March 1883.

41. RP, Add. Mss. 43616, Ripon to Hume, Barrackpore, 14 December 1883,

this to go on unchecked?"<sup>42</sup>

Hume's advice to overrule European opposition and hold on to original Ilbert Bill could not be of any avail. Bigger considerations out-weighed the Viceroy's decision. In a note on Ilbert Bill Amendment he wrote:

"There can be little or no doubt that if the Bill had been opposed up to the end by the Anglo-Indian party, great efforts would have been made, upon a change of Government at home, to get the measure repealed."<sup>43</sup>

Ripon's defeat was India's defeat. But, in the heat and dust of the anti-Ilbert Bill agitation of the White race, there emerged a determination of the Indian people to politically organise themselves for united action. Any such organization, of course, was likely to take the character of an Opposition. The Indian National Conference, which met at Calcutta in those ugly days of racial demonstrations, was only a prelude of something bigger to follow.

Ripon's regime saw the beginning of the end of the Pax Britannica in Indian empire. His five year term was to expire in June 1885. But he prepared to leave India earlier for obvious reasons. As early as June 1884 he sounded it to Gladstone: "It seems to me to be of great importance that the appointment of the next Viceroy should not fall into the hands of the Tories and I shall be ready heartily to acquiesce in any arrangement calculated to avoid the occurrence of such an evil . . . Let me earnestly beg you to give me as a successor a man of really liberal opinions. In the present condition of this country a truly and broadly liberal policy is essential not only to the discharge of our duty as a nation but to the security of our power as a government."<sup>44</sup>

Ripon's liberal successor Dufferin arrived in Calcutta on 13 December 1884 and was inducted into the office of Viceroy with the usual ceremony. He found Ripon looking remarkably well. Most kindly the outgoing Viceroy did everything he could

42. RP, Add. Mss. 43616, Hume to Ripon, Simla, 18 December 1883.

43. GP, Add. Mss. 44287, Ripon's note on Ilbert Bill Amendment. Ripon had repealed Lytton's Vernacular Press Act which could have afforded a precedent.

44. GP, Add. Mss. 44287, Ripon to Gladstone, 25 June 1884.

to instruct his successor upon all outstanding public questions. Dufferin was struck by the moderation, the good sense, the justice of his predecessor's views, and, above all, by his magnanimity, for "in spite of the harsh treatment he has received, he spoke of no one with the slightest bitterness."

On 15 December 1884, Ripon was leaving Calcutta. "I accompanied him to the train this morning," Dufferin reported home, "when a large number of Natives assembled in the streets and clapped and cheered him as he passed. He is to receive innumerable addresses on his journey to Bombay, where a great reception awaits him. No Viceroy probably has ever left India amidst such general and genuine expressions of goodwill on the part of the Indian population; and I am glad to find that I shall have no difficulty in following the general lines of his policy . . . I sincerely hope that England will give Ripon the good reception he deserves. No man has worked so laboriously, or with a more single-minded purpose. My respect both for his capacity and for his character has greatly increased since I have studied what he has done and written. I have no doubt that the storm provoked by the Ilbert Bill will soon be forgotten, and that his administration will stand forth in its true benignant character."<sup>45</sup>

Ripon's rule ended an epoch of British Indian history. Within one year of his departure, by next December, the stage was set for the rise of the Indian National Congress to open a new chapter in Indo-British relations.

45. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/2, Dufferin to Kimberley, 15 December, 1884.

## The Emergence of the Indian National Congress

“IT is very difficult,” wrote an English observer of the Indian situation on 23 December 1885, “to make people arriving from London, full of English politics and of ardour to do something, understand that India is passing through a very severe revolution. The India I first saw 28 years ago (the time of Mutiny) was farther from the India of to-day than it was from the India of Lord Clive’s time.”<sup>1</sup> John Biddulph who wrote these words did not imagine that within a week of that date was going to rise an organisation named the Indian National Congress as a manifestation of that ‘severe revolution’.

1885. Struggle for freedom was still far from people’s vision. Farther still, the coming of independence. Bal Gangadhar Tilak was 29, Gopal Krishna Gokhale 19, and the man who was to lead the Congress to its ultimate goal, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, was doing his matriculation in a school, a boy of 16. The generation that was to follow his leadership was either in infancy or not yet born. 1885 saw the generation of Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozeshah Mehta, Mahadev Govinda Ranade, Ananda Charlu, Badruddin Tyabji, Dinshaw Wacha, Subramania Iyer and Woomesh Chandra Bonnerjee, among

1. NC, Mss. Eur. C 144/6, John Biddulph to Northbrook, 23 December 1885.



others, in its prime. It was also the time of Allan Octavian Hume, William Wedderburn, and Charles Bradlaugh, among their English contemporaries, who got directly involved in the Indian affairs of that time.

In 1885, Queen Victoria had only two years left to complete a glorious reign of half a century. By December of that year, the Viceroy and Governor-General of India, the Earl of Dufferin had completed one year of his rule. From June of that year till February of the next year, Lord Randolph Churchill was the Secretary of State for India. At the Presidency of Bombay, the rule of James Fergusson had ended in March 1885, with Lord Reay assuming office as his successor.

The year was regarded important in the history of the municipalities in India. Elections were held in most of the provinces for the first time under the new and more popular system of Municipal Government. For the educated, that was the beginning of an experiment in the direction of that far-away utopia called democracy. In 110 colleges and college departments, more than ten thousand undergraduates received their modern lessons in English. And there were 122,250 schools of all grades with more than 3,300,000 pupils on roll. India possessed in 1885 more than 300 vernacular newspapers, published regularly in almost all regional languages, to feed the curiosity of the educated and the literate. During that year, nearly nine thousand books and magazines, both in English and vernacular languages, awaited publication throughout British India.

In 1885, Lord Dufferin was fighting the Third Anglo-Burmese War, and his generals were leading occasional expeditions against the turbulent tribes on the north-west and north-east frontiers. But on the whole, it was a peaceful year, the war and the expeditions being of a light character. There were no internal troubles, and the total revenue of India had gone up to nearly double the revenue of the time before the Mutiny.

For Victoria Regina, her Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for India, and the Indian Viceroy and Governors, 1885 did not begin with any ominous sign for the future. But the year ended with an omen, the birth of the Indian National Congress.

No country in the late nineteenth century understood better

than Great Britain the constitutional significance of a political Opposition. And, no Government on earth felt the power of that Opposition more definitely than the British Government. For any sitting Government in that country it was easier to face an external threat to survival than a political challenge from within. It was known to every Englishman that a political Opposition was as necessary to democracy as a ruling Cabinet, and that the growth of British democracy would have been impossible without the evolution of an Opposition.

But all such ideas were applicable only to the Englishmen in their own country. There was no question of an Opposition to the Government in the British Indian Empire. It was inconceivable any way to have a party or group to criticise overtly or otherwise the actions or policies of the Indian administration since India was not a democracy. Moreover, the eventual rise of an Opposition was not within the range of possibility when the empire was at the zenith of its glory and particularly in an era when the British statesmen felt smugly complacent in respect of their significant achievements in giving India rule of law, equity, and justice.

The birth of the Congress disturbed the tranquillity of the time. The questions to haunt the British Indian bureaucracy were of vital nature affecting the very basis of an imperial structure. Should the National Congress be an Opposition to the Government of India? Should it also behave like a Parliament of the Indian people to debate the conduct of their rulers?

For the political leaders in Britain, the questions were of still deeper meaning. Was it going to be a national political party aspiring for the same ultimate goals for which political parties existed? Since the Regulating Act of 1773 the British Parliament had claimed its effective authority over the Indian affairs. Since the much improved Pitt's India Act of 1784 the sway of Parliament had increased stage by stage to its logical finality. There had been many battles on behalf of the princes, and finally a great revolt by the princes, the people and the sepoys of the army to overthrow the British. But there was never a definite political platform from where an Indian national party could challenge the politico-administrative policies of

Parliament openly, though, in a sense, constitutionally. One hundred and one years after the Pitt's India Act, the Indian National Congress was born to function on those lines.

Two names of the ruling race are permanently associated with the birth of the Congress, Allan Octavian Hume and His Excellency The Right Honourable Sir Frederick Temple Hamilton-Temple, Earl of Dufferin." The former, open, arduous and honest, by his unique role coordinated the political thought process of the Indian leadership and came to deserve the appellation, both from his contemporaries and the posterity, as the founder of the Congress. The latter, by his initial good wish, subsequent second thoughts, and ultimate criticism, made his role mysterious, symbolising the initial perplexity of his race towards an unexpected reckoning.

Allan Octavian Hume was the son of a distinguished Member of British Parliament, Joseph Hume.\* Coming from the northern regions of Scotland, Joseph Hume was known for his opposition to the traditional ruling factions of his days in Parliament. Allan Octavian possessed the convictions of radicalism which had made his father quite renowned in British politics. Born in 1829, he came to India at the age of twenty and began his career as a district officer. Twenty years later he was occupying the office of a Secretary to Government of India. Ten years after that, when he was fifty, he was already a rebel within the rigid frame of the official world. His grievances against his countrymen were that they asserted their supremacy at the point of bayonets, and that they did not think of the stability of the administration through the enlightenment of the people and through their moral or intellectual capacities.<sup>2</sup>

When Ripon ruled India, Hume was already known as a friend of the Indian people and sympathetic to their grievances against the British rule. "I will not join in any work," he informed the Viceroy in May 1882, "except what I believe to be directly for the good of my fellows, and I will not of course take anything

\* Joseph Hume: 1777-1855.

2. See CC, 9-11.

directly or indirectly for doing that which it is simply my duty to do. Do not please take the trouble to reply to this. If ever you should want me, it will be time enough to write to me.”<sup>3</sup> Ripon indeed utilised Hume to act as an unofficial spokesman of the Viceroy when he wanted to communicate something to his subject people by way of advice or instruction. “In the *Pioneer* of the 4th is a letter of mine which I hope you will take the trouble to read. In this I have told my native friends, as nearly as possible, I think what you told me to tell them,” he said to Ripon on 6 November 1882.<sup>4</sup>

In the thick of the Ilbert Bill storm when the European community stood solidly against the Viceroy, Allan Octavian acted as the staunchest supporter of the latter, though to his considerable consternation he saw the great Viceroy bowing down before his foes. Hume saw in that defeat great harm being done to the British rule by the British race itself.

Taking upon himself the stupendous responsibility of bridging the widening gulf, Hume became interested at the departure of Ripon, in organising the Indian leadership for a common purpose under the ostensible European discipline of organisational decorum. In essence, his purpose in helping the Indian leaders to come together in an organisation was to create a sense of involvement in them in the affairs of their own administration for the better functioning of a government which he wished to see adopt a more enlightened form. In 1885, Hume was at his best. He was the most daring man for a unique venture.

Of necessity, Hume turned to the new Viceroy, Dufferin. Among the British rulers of India, there have been persons whose character created no confusion for those who wanted to know them. The minds of men like Ripon or Curzon were never a closed book to their contemporaries. But there were rulers who could seldom be understood either in matters of their personal attitudes or political principles. One such individual was Lord Dufferin. He puzzled people in India and in England, the Liberals and Conservatives alike, his friends and foes, by

3. RP, Add. Mss. 43616, A.O. Hume to Lord Ripon, 28 May 1882.

4. Ibid, Hume to Ripon, 6 November 1882.

incoherent policies and inconsistent conduct.

After a close observation of Dufferin, and after having heard a good deal of him, John Biddulph confidentially wrote to Lord Northbrook in December 1885; "He is certainly very different from any Viceroy we have yet had. He does not take the slightest interest in any details of administration, never asks questions and does not want to be told; if he is told he appears to forget immediately. On the other hand he is very shrewd, is very quick in reading character, and in big matters takes his own way very deliberately, and does not try to put his own responsibility on to other people."<sup>5</sup>

Dufferin, though a Liberal, was considered 'a most admirable foil to Lord Ripon', which he rightly was. On his arrival in India, he was confronted with the problem of pleasing both the Europeans and Indians, and also the problem how far to abandon Ripon's policies and how far to retain them. "For fear the Natives might suspect I was disposed to discontinue, if not to reverse Ripon's friendly policy, I took the earliest opportunity of paying him some well-deserved compliments," he said, and felt sure at the same time that "the British Colony will be very glad of the opportunity I propose to offer them of making their peace with Government House."<sup>6</sup> Such a role was imperative for the Viceroy which it was impossible for him to escape. But the need to please the angry Europeans weighed heavily in his policy sheet for obvious reasons. There was yet another factor to disturb his political thinking. Within a few months of his Indian administration the Liberal Government at home was overthrown which took him completely by surprise. The Conservative Government no doubt assured him of its confidence, but yet, he was terribly worried about the person of his immediate boss, Secretary of State for India, Lord Randolph Churchill. "I fear," wrote the Viceroy, "he has a natural propensity 'to get hold of the wrong end of the stick'. Moreover his letter to Lord Granville has filled me with bitter indignation, so that I shall not have much personal pleasure in

5. NC, Mss. Eur. C 144/6, John Biddulph to Lord Northbrook, 23 December 1885.

6. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/2, Dufferin to Kimberley, 15 December 1884.

communicating with him, though of course I shall loyally do my best to render his administration of this country as successful as possible.”<sup>7</sup> The Viceroy felt happy to understand that there was a mutual inclination on both sides, Conservatives and Liberals, to keep India out of the vortex of party politics; yet, for him, to keep the Conservatives pleased at every step was no easy task. In any case, the year 1885, being the first year of his Indian career, with prospects of fluctuating politics at home and with the clouds of war gathering on the Burmese front, was a difficult year for Lord Dufferin.

It was on one day in that year that Allan Octavian Hume met the Viceroy in connection with his proposed Indian organisation. Their actual talk on the subject remained a closely guarded secret for some time and when it came to surface, the two were already at loggerheads, calling names and bestowing abuses on each other. It was in January 1889, three years after the birth of the Congress, that an angry Hume disclosed to Lord Ripon the story of Dufferin’s conduct in regard to the Congress. Reciting the lines from Pope—‘What dire offence from petty causes springs, What mighty contests rise from trivial things’—he went on to say why Lord Dufferin after promising sympathy for the Congress, at the last moment, ‘spat in our faces and bolted’. “His Lordship is an ass, and a weak and touchy ass to boot,” said Hume of Dufferin and after describing a lot of things, wrote the following lines:

“In June 1885, before the Congress was started Lord Dufferin was one of the first persons consulted. At that time the idea was to include officials as well as non-officials, and Lord Reay was to have been invited to be the first President both by reason of his warm sympathy with the movement and his being Governor of the Province in which the first Congress was to be held.

“Lord Dufferin warmly approved the proposal, considering that it would at last furnish the Government with something like an authoritative statement of the views and wishes etc. of the educated and intelligent classes throughout the country. The whole scheme exactly as it was carried out (save as regards

7. NC, Mss. Eur. C 144/5, Dufferin to Northbrook, 10 July 1885.

the exclusion of the official element) was laid before him—there has not been the smallest change in the programme—‘But’ he said I quote his exact words ‘Don’t ask Lord Reay to preside—don’t have officials—if you gentlemen do your duty you will criticise the administration—and officials ought not to take part in this—consider how awkward it will be for Lord Reay, if Grant Duff’s administration comes to be severely criticised whilst he is in the chair.’

“I told him that his views would I was sure be a law in such case, and he said ‘then I am perfectly satisfied. I wish you every success.’ Early in ’86, in the budget discussion he spoke highly of the Bombay Congress which had taken place in the meantime.”<sup>8</sup>

If Hume’s statement is correct, this was the role of Lord Dufferin at the inception of the Congress. The difficulty regarding his knowledge of the situation arose from his Sphinx-like posture thereafter, and that created a great mystery if Dufferin actually gave his so-called ‘blessings’ to the Congress at its birth. Several years later, W.C. Bonnerjee, the first President of the National Congress, wrote the following: “It will probably be news to many that the Indian National Congress, as it was originally started and as it has since been carried on, is in reality the work of the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava when that nobleman was Governor-General of India.”<sup>9</sup> According to Bonnerjee, A.O. Hume first conceived the idea that it would be of great advantage to India if the leading politicians of the country could be brought together once a year to discuss social matters, and that politics should form no part of their discussion, for, there were already recognised political bodies in Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and other parts of India. “Full of these ideas he saw the noble Marquis when he went to Simla early in 1885 after having in the December previous assumed the Viceroyalty of India. Lord Dufferin took great interest in the matter and after considering over it for some time he sent for Mr. Hume and told him

8. RP, Add. Mss. 43616, Hume to Ripon, Allahabad, 13 January 1889.

9. DML, 8023 aa 45, INC, W.C. Bonnerjee on the Origin of the Congress.

that, in his opinion, Mr. Hume's project would not be of much use. He said there was no body of persons in this country who performed the functions which Her Majesty's Opposition did in England. The newspapers, even if they really represented the views of the people, were not reliable and as the English were necessarily ignorant of what was thought of them and their policy in native circles, it would be very desirable in the interests as well of the rulers as of the ruled that Indian politicians should meet yearly and point out to the Government in what respects the administration was defective and how it could be improved; and he added that an assembly such as the proposed should not be presided over by the local Governor for in his presence the people might not like to speak out their minds."<sup>10</sup>

Hume felt convinced of Dufferin's arguments and placed before the Indian leaders in Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and other parts of the country both the schemes, his own and Lord Dufferin's, and the leaders 'unanimously accepted Lord Dufferin's scheme and, proceeded to give effect to it'. W.C. Bonnerjee finally informed that "Lord Dufferin had made it a condition with Mr. Hume that his name in connection with the scheme of the Congress should not be divulged so long as he remained in the country, and this condition was faithfully maintained and none but the men consulted by Mr. Hume knew anything about the matter."<sup>11</sup>

If the ruling Viceroy had made it a condition that his consent for the formation of a political organisation should be a matter of complete secrecy, that explains his silence on the subject during the period of his viceroyalty. His subsequent disclosure of the subject was ruled out in the light of subsequent developments, first, the Congress having proved itself a body of ambitious critics right from the start, and secondly, the British statesmen at home having shown considerable displeasure towards the Viceroy's suspected hand behind Hume's political machinations, thoughtlessly extended, but meticulously

10. BML, 8023 aa 45, INC. W.C. Bonnerjee on the Origin of the Congress.

11. Ibid, W.C. Bonnerjee gave these details while writing an introduction to Mr. Natesan's "Indian Politics" which was published in 1897,



utilised. Furthermore, within a short time, Dufferin had reasons to develop personal dislike for Hume to such an extent that it became almost impossible for him, either in India or in England, to revive any memory of their earlier agreement pertaining to a policy which ended in grave consequences for British rule.

Thus, the role of Lord Dufferin at the conceptual genesis of the Indian National Congress will remain somewhat indistinct, while the role of Hume is too elaborately recorded to need further description.

The first session of the Congress met at Bombay on 28-29 December 1885. The idea of some of the organisers to make Lord Reay, the Governor of Bombay, the President of the session did not materialise. This corroborates the inside story of Lord Dufferin having advised Hume not to do so. Principal Wordsworth of the Elphinstone College helped the leaders privately in formulating resolutions to be moved at the Congress. There was some curiosity on the part of the Bombay bureaucracy, but no immediate concern. Moreover, the curiosity of the executive was chiefly due to the outward composition of the Congress body. The following was one of the descriptions contained in official records:

“The spectacle which presented itself of men representing the various races and communities, castes and sub-divisions of castes, religions and sub-divisions of religions met together in one place to form themselves, if possible, into one political whole, was most unique and interesting. For they had come not from the Presidency towns alone, but from all parts of India, and their presence afforded a most interesting study of the heads and head-dresses typical of the numerous variety of castes and communities inhabiting this country.”<sup>12</sup>

While the curiosity of the observers from anthropological or sociological angle of view could have been profound indeed, it was the serious implication of their becoming a ‘political whole’ that mattered much. The President-elect, W.C. Bonnerjee, described the gathering as the ‘first National Assembly ever yet convened in India’. “It was not merely provinces,” he

said, "that were represented, almost all the Political Associations in the Empire were represented by one or more of the gentlemen present, while as regards the Press, the proprietors, editors or delegates of the *Mirror*, the *Hindu*, the *Indian Spectator*, the *Tribune*, and others showed, conclusively, the universality of the feelings which had culminated in the great and memorable gathering. Surely never had so important and comprehensive an assemblage occurred within historical times on the soil of India."<sup>13</sup>

The aims and objects of the Congress were: the promotion of personal intimacy and friendship amongst all the more earnest workers in the country's cause in the various parts of the Empire; and, the fuller development and consolidation of the sentiments of national unity. From an intellectual and ideological sphere nationalism was thus brought down to a practical and operative level. The founders of the Congress were full of praise for the British rule, but side by side, they proclaimed their aspirations about a new era, and became critical of many existing anomalies in Indo-British relations.

The National Congress in its birth-cry wanted to be heard. "In dealing with Englishmen," declared Dadabhai Naoroji, "make up your minds deliberately, speak clearly, and work perseveringly. Then and then alone can you hope to be listened to."<sup>14</sup> Why was there a need for the Congress to raise its voice? The answer came from Pherozeshah Mehta: "Our Legislative Councils in this country are merely shams. The truth is always buried, it is never allowed to rise to the surface."<sup>15</sup> And, in England, there was that governing body which was supposed to know things about India and which possessed power to pass opinion on the destiny of India's millions, but which in fact was a body of non-knowing and non-working functionaries. "In its inception," said Ananda Charlu, "the India Council was little better than a relic of the discredited John Company; in its next stage it was no better, for it was mainly little else than an oligarchy of fossilised Indian admi-

13. BML, 8023 aa 45, INC, Presidential Address by W.C. Bonnerjee, Bombay, 1885.

14. INC, First Session, 1885, Address of Dadabhai Naoroji.

15. Ibid, Address of Pherozeshah Mehta.

nistrators.”<sup>16</sup>. So, within the ambit of the British rule, India required a new political structure with the people of the land involved in it. Woomesh Chandra Bonnerjee, the President of the first session, declared in this context:

“I think that our desire to be governed according to the ideas of Governments prevalent in Europe is in no way incompatible with our thorough loyalty to the British Government. All that we desire is that the basis of the Government should be widened and that the people should have their proper and legitimate share in it.”<sup>17</sup>

The words of the founders of the National Congress conveyed deeper meaning to all concerned. As an organisation, the Congress, just at its inception, passed a series of resolutions containing serious reflections on the conduct of the Government. It demanded an enquiry into the working of the Indian administration, both in India and in England, by a Royal Commission with the people of India adequately represented thereon.<sup>18</sup> It recommended the abolition of the Council of the Secretary of State for India as it was constituted at that time, as a necessary preliminary to other reforms.<sup>19</sup> It demanded reform and expansion of the central and local legislative councils by the admission of a considerable proportion of elected members. It recommended that the budgets should be referred to those councils for consideration, and that their members should be empowered to interpellate the executive in regard to all aspects of administration. The Congress further suggested that a standing committee of the House of Commons should be constituted to receive and consider any formal protests that might be recorded by majorities of the legislative councils against the executive for overruling the decisions of such majorities.<sup>20</sup>

Of a deeper significance still were the resolutions which concerned some of the vital aspects of the imperial rule. In its opinion, resolved the Congress, “the proposed increase in the military expenditure of the Empire is unnecessary, and regard

16. INC, First Session, 1885, Address of P. Ananda Charlu.

17. Ibid, Presidential Address of W.C. Bonnerjee.

18. INC, Resolution I, 1885.

19. INC, Resolution II, 1885.

20. INC, Resolution III, 1885.

being had to the revenues of the Empire and the existing circumstances of the country, excessive.”<sup>21</sup> It also condemned, though of course indirectly, the Anglo-Burmese War of that year, and raised its voice against the impending annexation of Upper Burma.<sup>22</sup>

Thus the National Congress made itself known right at its birth. Rightly did Hume point out that “this Conference will form the germ of a National Parliament, and, if properly conducted, will in a few years constitute an unanswerable reply to the assertion that India is unfit for any form of representative institutions.”<sup>23</sup> In a still wider perspective Annie Besant looked at the Congress as the harbinger of a new era. To her: “The first National Congress dissolved, leaving a happy and inspiring memory of fine work done, and unity demonstrated. India had found her voice. India was realising herself as a Nation. Strange and menacing was the portent in the eyes of some. Splendid and full of hope in the eyes of others. The rosy fingers of the dawn-maidens had touched the Indian skies. When would her Sun of Freedom rise to irradiate the Motherland?”<sup>24</sup>

Did the Viceroy in Calcutta and the Secretary of State for India in London get the meaning of the occasion which was almost unique in significance and purpose? There is of course the fact about the person of the Secretary of State that he was expecting his fall from power at any moment during that month of December 1885. A short while before the Indian leaders were to meet in Bombay, Lord Randolph Churchill wrote to Dufferin: “It is quite on the cards that before this reaches you the Government will have ceased to exist.”<sup>25</sup> The Cabinet somehow survived December and Lord Randolph was still the Secretary of State when the Congress was born. But while so unsure of his position he perhaps could not comprehend the implications of what happened in Bombay. As for the Viceroy Dufferin, it is quite obvious that he kept his eyes open to what

21. INC, Resolution V, 1885.

22. INC, Resolution VII, 1885.

23. INC, Hume’s Opening Manifesto, 1885.

24. CC, 14-17.

25. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/3, Randolph Churchill to Dufferin, 11 December, 1885.

Hume and his Indian friends were doing in Bombay, but prudently enough decided to keep his lips tight on the subject. The day the Congress was meeting, the Viceroy was writing a letter to Churchill describing other things but giving no inkling of the Bombay gathering. Within a week of the birth of the Congress, he was writing again to his boss, but significantly enough he made no mention of the event. Ironically enough he was discussing the supply of Martini-Enfield Rifles to the troops for which he was straining 'every nerve to find the necessary funds'. The whole British army in India was required to be armed with that new weapon and the Viceroy was doing as best as he could in that direction.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, his mind was more drawn towards Burma which he was planning to visit than towards Bombay where the Congress met.

If the Viceroy or the Secretary of State had no immediate comment on the birth of the Congress, it was just a correspondent of *The Times* who showed his gift of understanding which brought out an intelligent Englishman's intuitive reaction to an event of that magnitude.\* When the National Congress had met and dispersed, *The Times* approved of some of the Congress resolutions while describing some others as 'something more than questionable'. Next, it printed the following note:

"It was by force that India was won, and it is by force that India must be governed, in whatever hands the Government of the country may be vested. If we were to withdraw, it would be, not in favour of the most fluent tongue, or the most ready pen, but the strongest arm and the sharpest sword."<sup>27</sup>

For thousands of those who read these lines in *The Times* the news of the birth of the Congress obviously carried in some

26. DC, Mss Eur. F 130/5, Dufferin to Randolph Churchill, Calcutta, 5 January 1886.

\* If this correspondent was Mr. Moylan, he was 'a very intelligent Irishman' about whom Dufferin wrote the following: "Moylan is a man of such a perverse and brutal temper, and so unprincipled, that it would be impossible for any Administrator to keep on terms with him, and his practice is to seek to destroy everybody who does not truckle to him." DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/5, Dufferin to Kimberley, Simla, 9 July 1886.

27. CC, 14-17.

degree an unpleasant surprise. The Congress had not asked the British to withdraw, but its resolutions had undoubtedly initiated a posture of confrontation. That the organisation clearly appeared as an Opposition, few doubted.

The Viceroy could not have delayed to make an assessment of the new situation and report it home at the earliest. Within three months of the rise of the Congress when he found himself ready to write about it, Randolph Churchill had fallen from power, succeeded to the office by Kimberley. In March 1886, Dufferin prepared a detailed report. "I now turn to a subject," he wrote to Kimberley, "which may or may not hereafter prove of considerable importance; but I cannot help having a strong suspicion that the course of events at home in regard to Ireland has produced a very considerable effect upon the minds of the intelligent and educated sections of our own native community. Associations and sub-associations are being formed all over the country, which is also being furnished with a network of caucuses, who of course work the telegraphic wire in the orthodox fashion. But a somewhat new development of this popular machinery has sprung into existence within the last few weeks, namely, the organisation of mass meetings of the ryots in various districts of Bengal."<sup>28</sup>

The Viceroy described at length how in order to collect a crowd various kinds of popular entertainments were organised which were like *tamasha* or jollification, and how 'bogus reporters' described in picturesque language the incidents of those meetings. He could not help thinking how long an autocratic Government like that of India would be able to stand the strain implied by 'the importation *en bloc* from England, or rather from Ireland, of the perfected machinery of modern democratic agitation'. Secondly, there was the free and uncontrolled Press, for the most part conducted by extremely clever and 'perfectly unscrupulous men', which was proving itself quite incompatible with the prevailing regime. "Day after day," said the Viceroy, "hundreds of sharp-witted Babus pour forth their indignation against their English oppressors in very

28. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/5, Dufferin to Kimberley, Calcutta, 21 March 1886.

pungent and effective diatribes. Facts are either invented or misrepresented to suit the purpose of these ingenious gentlemen, and I must say that the way in which they serve them up is by no means discreditable to their literary power.”<sup>29</sup> The Indian Press, in fact was not hostile to Dufferin personally even though he was the author of an Income Tax and an unpopular war. But his worry lay in the endeavours of the Press to excite animosity against the services, against a great number of chief functionaries, and against the administration in general.

How to counteract the politics of the Press in view of democratic popular agitations was Dufferin’s main problem. He was convinced that unceasing and uncontradicted denunciation of administration was sure to engender a widespread feeling of hostility towards the *Raj* from vast numbers of men. In other countries, the lies or misrepresentations on the one side were denounced by equally untruthful and hard-hitting champions on the other. In India, according to Dufferin, this balancing factor did not operate because it was the traditional policy of the Indian Government to maintain a dignified and stolid silence in reference to any attacks made upon it.

Therefore, in the context of the new situation, Lord Dufferin wanted to convince his superiors of the validity of an organisation like the Congress which the Government would like to hear in order to give an appropriate reply for silencing the critics. The earlier practice of reticence on the part of the authorities was eventually to prove out of place. Hence was there the need for a modified policy.

Without mentioning the name of the National Congress, but keeping the Congress resolutions in mind, and mildly justifying the need for dialogues between the rulers and the ruled, Lord Dufferin finally concluded his views on the Indian politics by saying:

“In this view I am not sure that one of the principal demands of the native party may not have its conveniences, namely, the right of interpellation. It would give the Government a legitimate opportunity of correcting mis-statements, and of disabusing the public mind of many of the hallucinations

29. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/5, Dufferin to Kimberley, Calcutta, 21 March 1886.

which now obtain a lively currency here and, what is worse, are carefully revitalised by telegrams to the English newspapers . . . I am rather anxious to ascertain in what direction your own opinions are setting, especially in reference to such questions as the re-construction of the Supreme Legislative and the Provincial Councils, which is one of the chief planks in the native liberal platform.”<sup>30</sup>

This letter of Dufferin is indicative of his sympathetic attitude towards an Indian organisation as conceived by Hume and suggested to him earlier, as well as his appreciation of the utility of that body after it was born. The Congress, in its very first resolution, had demanded for a Royal Commission to enquire into the working of the Indian administration. Sympathetic towards an idea like that he had congratulated the Secretary of State in March 1886 who indicated that a Parliamentary Committee for investigating Indian questions had been appointed even though he saw popular disappointment that the matter had been relegated to a Committee instead of to a Commission. But when he heard that London was changing its opinion on the subject, he at once wrote back to Kimberley saying: “The idea having once been started, it will be a misfortune if it cannot be gone on with, and I think the time has come to let a little air and light into the dark places of our administration, and to allow some of the questions about which the Native representatives are making so much fuss to be fully and exhaustively argued out. The discussion would clear the atmosphere, get rid of a good deal of mis-statement and misrepresentation, and might also show the possibility of meeting their wishes in other respects.”<sup>31</sup>

The Earl of Kimberley, the Secretary of State for India, in the meantime was doing his bit of research on Indian situation in general. He had notes before him on the Indian educated class, and other matters from the Home Department. The Viceroy’s information provided further material for thought. The causes of the Indian unrest were deep lying, traceable to

30. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/5, Dufferin to Kimberley, Calcutta, 21 March 1886.

31. *Ibid*, Benares, 6 April 1886.



social and material changes, arising from new conditions, some of them peculiar to India, while others were common to the rest of the world. While railways and the telegraphs brought different parts of India into close daily and hourly communication with each other, the Western educational system created an educated class to give utterance to new ideas which existed in a nebulous state in the minds of many people. "All experience shows," felt the Secretary of State, "that it is a fatal mistake to suppose that 'agitators' create grievances and discontent. What they do is to give definite form and shape to the thoughts which pervade many minds. They, in other words, put the match to explosive materials."<sup>32</sup>

The Liberal Secretary of State had no faith in a mere repressive policy. The English democracy, so he felt, did not permit such a policy to be firmly and continuously pursued. There was the House of Commons to criticise reckless actions and the House itself was swayed by the opinions of the mass of the electorate which looked towards the governance of one-sixth of the human race in India with some concern. From all practical considerations, Kimberley thought of some solutions to the rising problems. "We must go forward," he advised the Viceroy, "to stand still and simply resist is not in our power, even if we were convinced it would be the safest course. The conclusion, therefore, at which I arrive is that some concessions to this native movement will have to be made, but I would use the utmost caution in making them, not going an inch beyond the necessity of the case, and, above all, carefully avoiding everything which might tend to fan the flame."<sup>33</sup>

Kimberley was aware of the demands which the native 'reformers' advanced in their several meetings. The National Congress had demanded the abolition of the Council of India which was one of the main issues on political platforms. To Kimberley this proposition proceeded from sheer ignorance of the subject. The Indian leaders who demanded it thought that it was the Council which threw obstacles in the way of some of the progressive measures of Lord Ripon, and that if it could

32. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/6, Kimberley to Dufferin, 22 April 1886.

33. Ibid.

be got rid of, Indian aspirations would be more easily satisfied. But, thought Kimberley, the Council being a representative body of experienced civil and military servants from Indian services, its usefulness was above question. "I cannot see how the Secretary of State would be benefited by being deprived of the invaluable assistance of such men as Sir Henry Maine, Sir Donald Stewart, Sir Aslay Eden, General Strachey and others," he asked. Regarding the other main demand of the Indian nationalists, namely, election of members of Legislative Councils, the Secretary of State was not prepared to consider the suggestion. "Some very cautious step in this direction may be desirable. To permit interpellations, however, will be a serious innovation. I am told that in 1861 or thereabouts this was tried and led to great embarrassment. Is it possible with an autocratic form of Government? I doubt it."<sup>34</sup>

Thus the Congress at its birth created a situation wherein the Viceroy and the Secretary of State were at a loss to understand how best to deal with that organisation. While the Viceroy in the initial phase adopted a favourable attitude, the authorities at home were yet in the dark about that organisation's real character. It depended on the Congress leadership whether it would give time to the Government to come out with a gesture of appreciation. The Government itself was indeed flexible in character. Divided into the major parties and alternating their position frequently the British policy makers took at times long long years to evolve stable principles on vital matters. When the Congress was emerging as a force, Cabinet fluctuations in England made it difficult for the executive to adopt a clear-cut stand. In March 1886, the Secretary of State complained:

"Strong and enduring Governments at home do not seem at all probable; and we have to solve the great problem whether a democratic House of Commons can long retain an Empire such as India."<sup>35</sup>

Whether India's rulers had time and opportunity or not to think of the Congress, the Congress had no time to wait.

34. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/6, Kimberley to Dufferin, 22 April 1886.

35. Ibid, 19 March 1886.

That organisation, after its formation, made ready use of the Indian Press in voicing its many grievances. The Viceroy's antipathy towards the Congress developed through his antipathy towards the Press. He felt provoked by the writings in the *Mirror* which he denounced as a 'cleverly-conducted but vicious paper' behind which he saw the hand of Surendranath Bannerjee. "Probably these men," felt Dufferin, "who are quick-witted and cunning rather than wise, scarcely know their own minds, or what they really want."<sup>36</sup> Within the next few days, the Viceroy further said:

"From one end of India to the other the Native papers are continually pouring forth a foul torrent of abuse against the Government, against the English rule, and against the principal officials who are within their own immediate neighbourhood. In this way there can be no doubt there is generated in the minds of those who read these papers—by no means an inconsiderable section in themselves—a sincere conviction that we are all of us the enemies of mankind in general, and of India in particular."<sup>37</sup>

Hume came to know of the Viceroy's attitude towards the Indian Press and decided to counteract it. In a pamphlet, he described in so many words that the Viceroy had either written or inspired to be written 'a certain very vulgar and brutal article in the *Pioneer*' and that he had further transmitted a message to the Secretary of State recommending restrictions on the Press and a general policy of 'stern coercion'. To Dufferin, such audacity of Hume was intolerable. In a meeting between the two, the Viceroy challenged Hume if he was the author of that writing and Hume admitted he was. The Viceroy asked him "how he could reconcile it th his conscience as a gentleman to propagate falsehoods of this description with the obvious view of throwing odium on my administration?"<sup>38</sup> Hume justified his action by saying that he saw the abstract of the despatch or letter which the Viceroy had written to the Secretary of State, and of another which D. Mackenzie Wallace, Private Secretary to the Viceroy had written to Sir Henry

36. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/5, Dufferin to Kimberley, 26 April 1886.

37. Ibid, 17 May 1886.

38. Ibid, 11 June 1886.

Maine, which had been transmitted from the India Office to Calcutta, and that that abstract seemed to be an outline of the *Pioneer's* article.

After this confrontation, Dufferin and Hume fell out from each other, as if, for ever. Time was nearing for the next session of the Congress in December 1886. The Viceroy till then professed to be in 'entire sympathy with the movement'. From Hume's side, the proposed resolutions of the Congress were first submitted to the Viceroy for his perusal. In the resolution dealing with the Legislative Councils scheme, there was a clause that neither the Viceroy, nor the Governors, nor the Lt. Governors should sit upon those Councils, but that they should communicate [with those Councils through the official members who should be the exponents of Government policies. To this Lord Dufferin took objection on the ground that "people in England would fancy that we were going in for regular constitutional Government with a responsible ministry at one jump."<sup>39</sup>

Dufferin was keeping an alert eye on the political situation and in November 1886, he informed the new Secretary of State, Lord Cross, that he had decided 'to establish an Intelligence Department all over India'. "The growth of political as well as of religious excitement during the last few years in this country also renders it advisable that the Central Government should know whatever is passing in the various provinces."<sup>40</sup> By December the Viceroy had gathered plenty of information regarding the Congress affairs, especially regarding the attitude of different communities towards the Congress.\* He eagerly awaited its proceedings.

And, the National Congress met in Calcutta, the capital of the British Indian Empire, in the closing days of December 1886. The first session in Bombay was attended by 72 delegates only.\*\* The second session claimed to represent the whole of

39. RP, see Add. Mss. 43616, Hume to Ripon, 13 January 1889.

40. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/5, Dufferin to Lord Cross, 16 November 1886.

\* See the Chapter on National Congress vis-a-vis Anglo-Muhammedan Rapprochement.

\*\* 18 from Bombay, 8 from Madras, 8 from Poona, 6 from Surat, 3 from Calcutta, and the rest from the rest of India.

India in a more definite manner. Nearly 500 delegates had gathered, having been elected in some form or other by public or political bodies, by societies, associations, and organisations of different kinds. The supreme authorities in Calcutta got a chance to observe the Congress from close quarters and to ascertain its character by direct means. The political character of the body was no longer a subject of speculation. In fact, the members of the Governor-General's Executive Council refused to accept invitation to attend the session on the ground that it was a political gathering. Lord Dufferin himself was in a dilemma. He, as the head of the Indian Government, could not impolitely close his eyes to the presence of the foremost Indian leaders of that time within yards of the Viceregal palace. He was equally unable to grant them any recognition as a body for apparent reasons. By way of a compromise, Dufferin received some of the leading Congressmen just as 'distinguished visitors', and entertained several others at a garden party, without recognising them as the representatives of any party.

Dadabhai Naoroji was the President of the second session, a man who wanted to be a link between the Indian Congress and British Parliament. His attitude towards the Government was sober and sympathetic. He was emphatic in his appreciation of the merits of the British rule. He reminded the Congress delegates from all parts of India that an assemblage of that kind could not have been imagined even in the most glorious days of ancient Hindu rule, or even in the days of the great Akbar when people of different provinces composed of all classes and communities could have met, all speaking one language and all having common and high aspirations of their own. "It is our good fortune," he said, "that we are under a rule which makes it possible for us to meet in this manner. It is under the civilising rule of the Queen and people of England that we meet here together, hindered by none, and are freely allowed to speak our minds without the least fear and without the least hesitation. Such a thing is possible under British rule and British rule only."<sup>41</sup>

41. BML, 8023 aa 45, INC, Second Session, Address of Dadabhai Naoroji, Calcutta, 1886.

In a parliamentary and constitutional manner Dadabhai wanted to bring the Indian opinion to the notice of the rulers, both in India and in England. He tried to assure the authorities that the Congress was not a nursery for sedition and rebellion against the British Government. On the other hand, it was yet another piece of stone 'in the foundation of the stability of that Government'.

"But the question is," he asked, "do the Government believe us? Do they believe that we are really loyal to them?"<sup>42</sup> The Congress, under his leadership, expressed grave concern over the growing miseries of the people. It was an appeal to the public conscience in England that the people of India, after a hundred years of British rule, suffered so much of poverty. The so-called benefits of the British rule stood contradicted as the country continued to sink deeper into the abyss of destitution. Leaders talked of the 'universal discontent of the masses', and of their 'growing wants and increasing poverty'. As the Congress searched for remedies, many came to realise that it could only be the people's representatives who, through their knowledge of things, were in a better position to suggest to the Government how best to face and solve the chronic problems of India. The natural conclusion, therefore, was to demand for representation. Madan Mohan Malaviya declared:

"What is an Englishman without representative institutions? Why?—not an Englishman at all, he is a mere sham, a base imitation . . . Representative institutions are as much a part of the true Briton as his language and his literature. Will any one tell me that Great Britain will, in cold blood, deny us, her free-born subjects, the first of these when by the gift of the two latter, she has qualified us to appreciate, and incited us to desire it. 'No taxation without representation'—that is the first commandment in the Englishman's Political Bible. How can he patter with his conscience and tax us here, his free and educated fellow-subjects, as if we were dumb sheep or cattle?"<sup>43</sup>

42. BML, 8023 aa 45, INC, Second Session, Address of Dadabhai Naoroji, Calcutta, 1886.

43. Ibid, Address of Madan Mohan Malaviya, December 1886.

With the profession of loyalty on one side and the demand for representation on the other, the second session of the Congress drafted some significant resolutions. The first resolution said: "That this Congress . . . do humbly offer its dutiful and loyal congratulations to Her Most Gracious Majesty, the Queen-Empress, on the approaching completion of the first half century of her memorable, beneficent, and glorious reign, and heartily wish her many, many more and happy years of rule, over the great British Empire."<sup>44</sup> The second resolution said: "That this Congress regards with the deepest sympathy, and views with grave apprehensions, the increasing poverty of vast number of the population of India, and desires to record its fixed conviction that the introduction of Representative Institutions will prove one of the most important practical steps towards the amelioration of the condition of the people."<sup>45</sup> In other resolutions they advanced the demand for various other reforms including a complete separation of executive and judicial functions.

With considerable eagerness and some anxiety, the Viceroy collected information regarding the proceedings of the Congress. Hardly had the leaders dispersed, he formulated his own opinion on the Congress resolutions and reported to the Secretary of State: "An Indian Congress has met at Calcutta, and has passed some rather extravagant resolutions which I have asked Wallace to enclose to your Private Secretary. I saw one or two people who assisted at the Congress, and I am told that the tone of the proceedings was loyal and friendly to British rule, but that the character of the discussions was very childish, and reminded the auditor rather of an Eton or Harrow Debating Society than even of the Oxford or Cambridge Union."<sup>46</sup>

Though the Viceroy criticised the Congress resolutions, yet he understood well the value of those demands in the context of Indian consciousness. Cautiously enough he gave a little bit of credence to the substance of the Congress claims and decided

44. INC, Resolution I, 1886.

45. INC, Resolution II, 1886.

46. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/8 A and B, Dufferin to Lord Cross, 4 January 1887,

to acquaint the Secretary of State with his passing thoughts, if not mature and deliberate opinions. He was hesitant to speak out things boldly in the fear that his ideas might be discarded as wrong or bearing no test of examination. Lacking conviction himself, he was clearly incapable of carrying conviction with others. Yet, his assessment of the situation shows the statesman in him, even though timid to the core. "I am inclined to think," Dufferin wrote to Lord Cross, "that the time has come when it might be well to allow the natives who are now nominated to the Provincial and Supreme Councils to be elected, and to be somewhat increased in numbers . . . The elections ought not certainly to depend upon direct votes, but the members chosen should be the nominees of an elected college. Their numbers, moreover, ought never to be enlarged to a point which would enable them to embarrass or veto the Government . . . A concession of the kind now would stop a good deal of agitation. Of course to political agitation in India we can afford to be more or less indifferent at present, though I am by no means certain that this will continue to be the case. The danger is lest the extreme Radical Party and ignorant faddists in the British House of Commons may enter into an alliance with the Home Rule Party in India."<sup>47</sup>

The Congress session in Calcutta had one definite effect. The authorities got an opportunity to measure the intellectual capacity and practical wisdom of some of its leaders. To the Viceroy it appeared that "they are far more able and respectable in their individual capacity than as members of a rather hysterical assembly, in which the more violent and silly of their numbers rule the roast."<sup>48</sup>

With the opinions of the Indian authorities taking a clear shape towards the Indian National Congress, it was now time for the political leaders in England to ascertain the real character of that organisation. To the hostile forces, of course, the Congress organisation represented nothing good. The descriptions as given by *The Times* that the Congress was 'merely an affair of discontented place-seekers', that its leaders were

47. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/8 A and B, Dufferin to Lord Cross, 4 January 1887.

48. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/8 A, Dufferin to Lord Cross, 1 February 1887.



'men of straw, with little or no stake in the country', that they were 'persons of considerable imitative powers', 'of total ignorance of the real problems of Government', and that the 'delegates from all these talking clubs might become a serious danger to public tranquillity', etc. represented one line of approach in understanding that body.<sup>49</sup> It was for the leaders in Parliament in general, and leaders of different shades of political opinion in particular, that the task of making an objective assessment of the Congress became an urgent need. The Congress had been born and had come to stay. Parliament till then was aware of the fact that there was no way to know what India thought of her own needs and what in fact the people thought of their rulers. Even Lord Randolph Churchill had once said: "In India it is not as it is in England. In India you have no public opinion to speak of—you have no power of the Press. You have hardly any trammels upon the Government of any sort or kind."<sup>50</sup> With the coming into existence of the Congress it now appeared definite that what Parliament felt as its own need, the Congress came forward to meet it, though of course in its own way.

Those were the days when Indian affairs passed through Parliament without drawing much serious attention. Members thundered their prepared or unprepared speeches when benches were empty. Responsible Ministers of the Crown presented their annual financial statements late in the session when the Members were tired and the House was anxious to break. No fair consideration was possible of the many grievances of the people. With no criticism from India as regard to the scant attention which Parliament paid to many serious problems facing millions of men, it was easy for honourable Members to take things lightly and conduct the debates as formal rituals. The National Congress broke that traditional insincerity.

It was Charles Bradlaugh who first made a forceful demand in the House of Commons that the Indian matters be discussed in a manner which would convince the Indian National Congress of the value of Parliamentary attention. Bradlaugh's

49. See CC, 18-26.

50. PP, Commons, see Debates on East India Revenue Accounts, Randolph Churchill quoted by Bradlaugh, 9 September 1887.

sympathy towards India was no secret to Parliament. It was equally well known to the Indian leaders who knew Bradlaugh well. A year before the birth of the Congress, an 'unknown Hindoo Writer' had published a pamphlet entitled 'Bradlaugh and the House of Commons From a Hindoo Point of View'.<sup>51</sup>

It expressed appreciation of the originality which Bradlaugh possessed in an otherwise traditional society, and the courage he showed in defying the whole body of Parliament on matters of progressive outlook resting on conscience. In Parliament, Bradlaugh represented the working class of Britain. A pronounced Radical, endowed with a big, powerful figure and the gift of ready and telling wit, he rose in politics as a popular leader, though ever remained 'obnoxious' to many so-called respectable persons. His writings found wide circulation among the humbler sections of the reading public in which he frankly criticised religious dogmas and upheld the values of 'modern thought and scientific research'. It was his intense desire to give practical effect to the teachings of political economists for the benefit of men. When, forgetful of the time he lived in, he advocated a rigid application of checks to over-population in order to contain the terrible evils of poverty, some of his 'opponents in respectable society' even went to the extent of instituting a case in a court of law. For very many of his progressive ideas, Bradlaugh at length came to be regarded as "a man without caste, a Pariah on whom everybody priding himself on his reputation and his responsibility thought it well to heap terms of opprobrium. Polite society shrank from him as from a leper."<sup>52</sup>

When Bradlaugh at length entered Parliament after trying to win a seat for nearly twelve years, he continued to be in bad terms with many, though to some persons he appeared 'as a whitewashed outcast'. But in no time, he enraged Parliament by refusing to take oath of allegiance to the reigning sovereign in the prescribed manner with the words such as 'I swear' and 'so help me God'. In the heated controversy which followed, one of the Honourable Members, Sir Henry Tyler, even

51. Bodleian Library, Oxford, 22773 e 1(9), *Bradlaugh and House of Commons*, London, 1884.

52. *Ibid*, Letter No. 1, London, September, 1880.

proceeded to quote the lines of Dr. Young, the author of *Night Thoughts*:

‘A daring infidel

Of all earth’s mad men most deserves a chain’,  
suggesting thereby to commit Bradlaugh at once to prison. Bradlaugh, of course, did not go to prison, but remained in Parliament as the most daring Member of that time, fearless of God or Government, but a friend of the people who suffered wrongs.

To such a man fell the duty of introducing the new-born Indian National Congress to the Members of the British House of Commons. In September 1887, when the Commons took up the East India Revenue Accounts\* as the eighth item of the day in an empty House on one of the last days of the session, Bradlaugh described it as disgraceful and pointed out that the people of India believed that they had a serious array of grievances, which they thought ought to be considered by the House. He narrated how at the first two sessions of the National Congress their leaders were full of loyal expressions. He quoted the President of the Calcutta session as saying: “How impracticable any such representative and all-class-and creed-embracing meeting would have been under any previous regime, Hindu or Mohammedan”, and that “it was under British Rule, and British rule alone, that such a national gathering was possible.” Next, he proceeded to describe how the Congress hoped at the same time that the extreme hardship under which the people suffered should come to an end. He referred to a ‘serious declaration’ of the Congress that among the Indian population poverty was continually increasing and as a remedy against it, how they longed for representative institutions in their country. Bradlaugh reminded the Commons:

“So long as Parliament denied India representative institutions, so long did it become the special duty of Parliament to examine most carefully into the grievances of the country, and give the people there no cause of complaint that consideration of subjects of importance to them had been avoided.”<sup>53</sup>

\* The Annual Financial Statement.

53. PP, Commons, Charles Bradlaugh, 9 September 1887,

Charles Bradlaugh became the spokesman of the Indian National Congress in the British House of Commons. Side by side, he urged upon the Members to think that "it was not upon our military domination of India that we ought to rest, or try to rest, in the future. Our rule ought to be secure by attracting the willing co-operation of the Indian people."<sup>54</sup>

Many in Parliament, however, were not prepared to believe in the validity of the Congress grievances. Reluctantly enough, it was considered permissible that what the Congress advanced as grievances could better find expression in the House of Commons, because, 'on investigation many of them would be found really not to be substantial'. This was an argument, typical of parliamentary tactics as well as governmental diplomacy. Parliament continued to satisfy itself as usual that the conditions in India did not call for any reconsideration of the imperial mandate and there was no need, therefore, to pay any serious attention to the Congress claims. John Gorst, the Under Secretary of State for India, replied to Charles Bradlaugh:

"I venture to say that the Government of India, on the whole, is one of the most beneficent Governments which the world has ever witnessed; that the Government is, on the whole well, administered, in a more true sense for the benefit of the governed than has been any other Government the world has ever witnessed; that it is, on the whole, one of the justest and most equitable Governments which history gives us any account of; and that, so far from the people of India having any ground of complaint because they are under the rule of Great Britain instead of under the rule of the tyrants who held sway over them before the advent of British rule, the Natives of India have very good reason to be grateful for the establishment and continuance over them of our beneficent Government."<sup>55</sup>

Such arguments, no doubt, pleased the majority of Members on either side of the House. But there were a few men who did not consider the Congress a purposeless body

54. PP, Commons, Charles Bradlaugh, 9 September 1887.

55. Ibid, John Gorst, 9 September 1887,

and to whom many of the demands advanced by the Congress were worthy of adoption.

What appeared constitutionally sound to them were the demands that 'there should be some means in India of questioning the Government as regards the administration of the affairs of the country, and that there should be some method in England for controlling the expenditure of the money which is drawn from the people of India'. Similarly, it was quite reasonable for the Congress to demand that there should be a Standing Committee of the Commons 'to hear appeals from Local Bodies against the Executive Government of India in matters of finance and administration'. It went to the credit of the House of Commons that the Indian Congress reposed its confidence in that great legislature and wanted it to guide the Indian Government for the good of the Indian people.<sup>56</sup>

The National Congress, once it became a subject matter of discussion in the House of Commons, came to draw more and more attention from responsible political quarters in Britain. For the Indian authorities, it was still an open issue whether to extend towards it a friendly or hostile attitude. When the third session of the Congress met in Madras in December 1887, Lord Connemara, the Governor of Madras, lent his support to the reception committee in making appropriate arrangements for the holding of the session in his capital city. According to Hume, this annoyed the Viceroy greatly. As he put it: "The Madras Congress was a great success. Lord Connemara was very cordial and kind about the matter. I have reason to believe that Lord Dufferin was annoyed at him for this and wrote to him finding fault with his action."<sup>57</sup> Hume claimed to have got this information from one of the Governor's own family members.

Badrudin Tyabji presided over the Madras session. The Congress thought it necessary to discuss how responsible persons in England talked ill of the organisation. It was already known how Lord Salisbury thought it necessary to group 'Indians and Hottentots together as equally outside the pale of

56. PP, Commons, see the Speech of R.T. Reid, 9 September 1887.

57. PP, Add. Mss. 43616, Hume to Ripon, 13 January 1889,

political freedom', how Goldwin Smith ventured to suggest that 'to grant the Hindus any form of popular Government would be to hand them over to a murderous anarchy', and how Froude declared that in case the Indians showed any signs of discontent 'he would send a contingent of Australians and pack us off to other scenes', etc.<sup>58</sup> President Tyabji discussed at length how the Congress was criticised merely as a body of 'educated natives of India' who were disloyal to Government. "When they say," said Tyabji, "that the educated natives of India are disloyal, what does it mean? It means this: that in the opinion of the educated natives,—that is to say, of all the men of light and leading, all those who have received a sound, liberal and enlightened education, all those who are acquainted with the history of their own country and with the nature of the present and past governments, that in the opinion of all these—the English Government is so bad that it has deserved to forfeit the confidence and the loyalty of the thinking part of the population."<sup>59</sup>

The question was, should there be an understanding between the responsible political parties in England and the Congress leadership in India in matters of mutual interests or not? Eardley Norton who was present at the Madras Congress, expressed his concern that there should at all persist the ideas of an unconquerable antagonism between the Europeans and the Indians, a feeling that the wide gulf could not be bridged, and the reproach that "your objects are confined exclusively to the Native Communities of this vast continent, objects with which no Englishman can have any legitimate sympathy or tie."<sup>60</sup> The gulf was actually getting wider as time passed, no matter what the Congress sympathisers or their critics thought or said. The declarations made in the open sessions of the Congress and the resolutions passed therein were broadly constitutional. The addresses of several leaders were a mixture of loyal professions and clear criticisms which both pleased and annoyed the authorities. The open sessions were subject to

58. CC, see *Obiter Dicta*, Bishen Narayan Dar, December 1887.

59. BML, 8023 aa 45, INC, Third Session, Address of Badruddin Tyabji, 1887.

60. CC, Eardley Norton, December 1887.

observation by the highest officials in their respective political capitals where the Congress met. Grave concern or fear did not emanate from the hood of the Congress, as it did from the Congress tail, coiling snake-like in an unending manner over remote corners of a subcontinent surreptitiously, though definitely.

Allan Octavian Hume, in the meantime, was busy in drawing the attention of his countrymen to the chronic woes of the people which sapped the vitality of the empire. After the third session of the Congress in Madras, he wrote a pamphlet entitled 'An Old Man's Hope'. The author believed that his appeal would touch the finer sentiments of his nation and rouse a feeling of sympathy towards the 'dull misery of the countless myriads' for whom.

"Toil, toil, toil; hunger, hunger, hunger; sickness, suffering, sorrow, these, alas, are the key-notes of their short and sad existence."<sup>61</sup>

In 1888, Hume prepared detailed plans for Congress activities in accordance with some fundamental principles on which that body rested. He prescribed for the National Congress the role of a national movement with three-fold objectives, namely,

"First: the fusion into one national whole of all the different and, till recently discordant, elements that constitute the population of India;

"Second: the gradual regeneration among all lines, mental, moral, social and political, of the nation thus evolved: and

"Third: the consolidation of the union between England and India, by securing the modification of such of its conditions as may be unjust or injurious to the latter country."<sup>62</sup>

Though the Congress, according to Hume, was founded primarily and directly as a political institution, yet its role in promoting the social, mental and moral progress of the nation remained implied, and considered imperative. In order to attain a perfect national character for the organisation, the founder-fathers of the Congress decided to deal with issues which concerned the whole nation, and not any section. Diversities of India were known to her leaders. There could be

61. CC, 9-11.

62. SD, A.O. Hume on Aims and Objective of Congress, 30 April 1888.

“questions in regard to which Bombay would differ from Bengal. Europeans from Natives, Hindus from Mohomedans, Sunis from Sheahs; but all such are excluded from the Congress by its fundamental rule that it shall only pass and press resolutions on those questions in regard to which there is practically unanimity amongst the representatives of all classes and creeds of all provinces . . . The Congress is National, and it deals only with those questions on which the entire nation is practically agreed.”<sup>63</sup>

Among the interested English administrators who observed the Congress movement and studied its character in those early years of that organisation, Sir Auckland Colvin, the Lieutenant Governor of the then North West Provinces and Oudh appears to have been remarkably zealous and ardent in understanding its portents.

By early 1888, Lord Dufferin was seriously thinking of laying down the Viceroyalty of India at the expiry of his fourth year of office at the end of the year. “Four years of continual hard labour in such a situation as this is sufficient to satisfy the most active-minded man’s love of work, and I shall not be sorry to lay down my heavy burden, and to exchange it for a lighter employment,” he wrote.<sup>64</sup> The Viceroy had already developed a critical attitude towards the Congress, and during the last year of his administration he thought it prudent to wash his hands clean by openly showing disfavour to that body. But, yet, he wanted to be cautious. Describing them as ‘annual Babu Congresses’, Dufferin thought it desirable ‘to leave them alone’.

It was Auckland Colvin, however, who decided to go deep down to the bottom to make an assessment of the real potentialities of the ‘Babu Congresses’. He first distinguished between what the leaders of the Congress in their public addresses professed as their aims, and what in fact the mass of people understood of those aims as propagated through a network of organised agents and through their publications. For the local governments in the provinces and districts the Congress

63. SD, A.O. Hume on Aims and Objectives of Congress, 30 April 1888.

64. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/11A, Dufferin to Lord Cross, 6 February 1888.



politics at the top were of no urgent concern. But, the expression of political views at the lower levels was of great consequence to them. It was a matter of grave concern what effect the appeals of Congressmen to 'the ignorance, passions, and appetites of the people' were eventually to bring.

Secondly, at the surface, the aim of the Congress was understood to be a claim for a moderate share in the Legislative Councils and in the Executive Branch of the Government. Towards this, the mass of people could either develop a reasonable spirit of understanding or total indifference. At the same time, however, there was the chance for the people to understand that because of such claims upon the Government the Congress movement was hostile to the English authority in India. The Congress emissaries preached contempt of local authorities, 'holding them up as oppressive and unsympathetic', and among the people there were many turbulent and disaffected persons who were more easily influenced by such preachings. Consequently, as the number of the discontented and disaffected persons increased, the worries and anxieties of the Government proportionately began to grow. The Congress was thus becoming a source of trouble for the British at the very grass-roots.

Further, as Auckland Colvin thought, the Congress leaders did not bring home to the people their actual programme. On the other hand, the instruments they used to propagate their views were dubious, and they did not exercise prudence to calculate the real effect of their language on the people. It was the circulation of obnoxious pamphlets, and the doctrines of injudicious emissaries which contained the real seeds of disaffection and not the annual addresses or resolutions of the respectable Congress leaders. Colvin, therefore, advised the Viceroy:

"It is not, you will understand, if I have rightly expressed myself, the periodical meeting of the Congress which gives me concern. It is the esoteric doctrine daily preached to the people by a great variety of agents of unknown character and antecedents during the year which precedes that meeting. The arguments and speeches set forth at public meetings are before the world and can be discussed. But it is impossible to follow the steps of those who are admittedly engaged in daily educating

the people in their grievances and their wrongs, with a view to securing their support, and who, to that end, are holding up to their contempt all local authorities as the source and origin and instruments of the abuses which they explain to them, and which must be painted in these glaring colours in order to rouse them to that enthusiasm for popular representation which otherwise is wanting.”<sup>65</sup>

The Viceroy, in an earlier confidential circular to heads of local governments, wanted to know if interference in Congress meetings was desirable. Auckland Colvin did not see any reason to interfere with the regular annual sessions of the Congress. But he advised interference during the recess between the sessions when the Congress aims were misrepresented to create misunderstanding among the people. This he deemed necessary not at that particular moment, but in due course of time.

Lord Dufferin, in the meantime, had made his intention to resign known.\* The news caused a good deal of astonishment in India and a section of the Press ‘suddenly burst out in a very bitter spirit’ against him. “The newspapers I refer to,” he complained, “have taken their tone from a print called the *Indian Mirror* conducted by a cleverish scoundrel who represents what may be called the ‘irreconcilable’ Bengali party. His tactics all along have been, not to criticise anything that the Government or Viceroy has done or said, but to attribute to them whatever design he thinks will be most likely to render English rule most odious in the eyes of the people . . . The reason of the present outburst is that I am now going away without introducing any modifications into the constitution of the existing Councils. This is a bitter disappointment to them, for they had worked themselves up into the belief that they were on the eve of a change and their mortification is correspondingly bitter.”<sup>66</sup>

65. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/11 A, Enclosure No. 4, Note from Auckland Colvin, Naini Tal, 10 June 1888.

\* The cause of resignation was shown to be domestic difficulties. “For some time past I have been feeling very acutely the great disadvantages entailed upon my children by my absence in India just at a time when they most needed their mother’s and my own guidance and assistance.” DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/11 A, Dufferin to Cross, 6 February 1888.

66. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/11 A, Dufferin to Cross, 20 February 1888.

During the last nine months of his Indian career, Lord Dufferin adopted two lines of approach towards the Congress movement. As for the Congress organisation, he had no words of sympathy. But, towards the Congress desire for constitutional reforms, he extended his subtle approval in view of the larger interests of the British empire. His policy towards the Indian reforms is discussed in the next chapter. A brief reference to his attitude towards the organisation is necessary here in order to understand the widening gulf between the Government and the Congress.

The Viceroy decided to be outspoken both publicly and privately, while talking of the Congress. In March 1888, Calcutta prepared to give an ovation to him as the retiring Viceroy in a grand manner. Some of the nationalist leaders, on the other hand, decided 'to organise a body of three hundred students from the college and a couple of hundred ruffians from Lower Bengal to break up the meeting called by the Sheriff to determine the terms of the address'. Nothing of course was actually done, but the Viceroy felt so annoyed at the news of such a move that he described the suspected leaders in indecorous terms. In the meeting where the actual address was presented to him, Dufferin took the opportunity to advise the leaders to pursue their objects with temper and with due perception of the peculiar circumstances of the country. "To the writers in the public Press I would say," he declared, "follow your most honourable vocation in a manly, courageous, and faithful spirit . . . But do not seek to excite the hatred of the people against the Government by wilfully and maliciously attributing to it intentions and designs which are the fruit of your imagination."<sup>67</sup> Within a few months, he described the Congress as 'a mischievous organisation, in spite of the good intentions of some of its principal members'. He showed how, through pamphlets, an endeavour was being made to convince the uneducated classes that the Government of India was 'a pestilent, cruel, and malevolent despotism'.<sup>68</sup>

67. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/11 A, see Reply of the Viceroy to the Address presented to him on 23 March 1888.

68. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/11 B, Dufferin to Cross, 17 August 1888.

It is worthwhile remembering here, if Woomesh Chandra Bonnerjee's statement be correct, that in the year 1885 when Hume thought of organising the Congress to discuss social problems and not politics, it was Dufferin who wanted that there should be a body of persons to perform the functions which Her Majesty's Opposition did in England, and consequently advised Hume that it was both in the interests of the rulers and the ruled that the Indian politicians should meet yearly. That was one of the factors responsible for making Congress a political organisation at its birth. But, three years later, Dufferin had sharply revised his earlier thinking when he wrote to Lord Cross: "It is a great pity that these Congresses should have only occupied themselves with political questions, most of which they are incompetent to examine with any advantage. If, instead of adopting that line, they had discussed the great social and economic problems which are now pressing for solution in India, they might have been of great assistance to Government, though of course their assistance must always be out of harmony with so autocratic an Administration as ours."<sup>69</sup> The Congress politics of only three years had become enough of a headache to the administration so as to prompt the Viceroy to think on these lines.

Several new factors caused anxieties for the Viceroy. He received reports that a number of Government servants in various provinces acted as the agents of the Congress propaganda, and used their official position to collect subscriptions on its behalf. Obviously, those officers belonged to the lower ranks of various services. Dufferin hastened to tell the provincial administrations to put a stop to such practices on their own responsibility.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, information reached him that the Maharaja of Mysore contributed large sums to the National Congress. There was no sure way to ascertain the truth, but the Viceroy would not wait for confirmation. He sent a verbal message of warning to the Maharaja not to commit such mistakes. Subsequently, when the Viceroy heard that the Nizam of Hyderabad had sent even a larger contribution to the anti-

69. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/11 B, Dufferin to Cross, 17 August 1888.

70. Ibid, 24 September 1888.

Congress movement, he tried also to caution him not to do so. Finally, with further information at hand regarding personal involvement of the Government officers in Congress meetings, etc., Dufferin authorised the heads of local governments "to forbid servants of the State taking an active part in political demonstrations."<sup>71</sup> "There will be a howl over such a restriction," he felt, "but unless we introduce it at once, a good deal of mischief may arise."<sup>72</sup>

In November 1888, Lord Dufferin drafted a Minute on the Congress for official purpose. In an elaborate thesis he tried to show that the Congress had neither any root in the country nor was it capable of contributing much for the welfare of the people. Among vast millions of men there were 'only a very few thousands' who possessed qualifications for taking any intelligent view of even local public affairs. And, the number of those men who could at all comprehend the larger problems 'would have to be counted rather by tens than by hundreds'. "The chief concern of the Government of India," wrote Dufferin, "is to protect and foster the interests of the people of India, and the people of India are not the seven or eight thousand students who have graduated at the Universities, or the Pleaders recruited from their numbers who are practising in our Courts of Justice, or the newspaper writers, or the Europeanised Zemindars, or the wealthy traders, but the voiceless millions whom neither education, nor civilisation, nor the influence of European ideas or modern thought, have in the slightest degree transfigured or transformed from what their forefathers were a thousand years ago."<sup>73</sup> India, according to him, had numerous problems. He referred to the enormous danger of over-population, to excessive and useless expenditure on marriages and ceremonies, to chronic indebtedness of the *ryot* to the money lender, to insanitary conditions and habits leading to mortality of great number of men, and to widespread misery and degradation among women due to immoral custom of child marriage and virgin widowhood, so ruthlessly insisted upon by Hindu society. He expressed surprise that the

71. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/11 B, Dufferin to Cross, 8 October 1888.

72. Ibid.

73. SD, Lord Dufferin's Minute on the Congress, November 1888.

Congress did not pay any serious attention to the real and grave problems which faced the country. In summing up he said:

“The fact is that the Congress is the product only of that infinitesimal section of the Indian community to whom I have already referred as having been tinctured either directly or indirectly with an infusion of European education, European political ideas, and European literature. They neither represent the aristocratic sections of Indian society, nor are they in special contact or sympathy with the great masses of the population; and they do not understand their wants or necessities . . . and they are very imperfectly fitted to grasp any of the larger questions which affect the stability or safety of the Empire as a whole.”<sup>74</sup>

The Viceroy's great dictum—“We should be falling into a great error if, miscalculating the force and value of the Congress movement and the influence of its supporters and advocates, whether in the press or elsewhere, we were to relax in the slightest degree our grasp of the supreme administration of the country”—became more or less a rigid maxim for his successors in office, his subordinates in administration, and his superiors at home for years to come. That was the beginning of the inevitable conflict.

Lord Dufferin's days in India were coming to a close. At that stage he decided to make his views on the Congress known to everybody. Only a few days before his departure, he made a famous speech at the St. Andrews Dinner in Calcutta on 30 November 1888. It was considered an invective harangue. He described the educated people of his empire as a ‘microscopic minority’. Within three days, he poured out some of his bitterest words against some Indian politicians in a letter to the Secretary of State. Describing the movement as ‘the Home Rule movement in this country’, he discovered in it what he called ‘bastard’ disloyalty, ‘represented by a small Bengalee clique in Calcutta’. “I say ‘bastard’ disloyalty because,” wrote Dufferin, “though this party hates Englishmen and the English Rule, and desires to do all it can to injure and discredit them, I do not believe that in their own secret hearts they are aiming

74. SD, Lord Dufferin's Minute on the Congress, November 1888.

at any special ideal as a substitute.”<sup>75</sup> He suspected that some of the Indian leaders might be in communication with Russia, not knowing that ‘they would find Russia’s little finger bigger than our thigh’. Whether that was a fact or not, to the Viceroy, many of the Indian leaders were the ‘real enemies’ of the British. “On the other hand,” he said, “the Mahommedans, the Oudh Talookdars, and even most of the responsible and sensible Bengalees, have an instinctive dislike of the Congress and of its works; but midway between the two parties there stands a considerable mass of irresolute opinion, which has been watching with wonder the immunity extended to what in its view are the insubordinate proceedings of the Congress-Wallahs, such as Mr. Hume’s foolish threats of insurrection, and the dissemination of the libels and calumnies contained in the Tamil Catechism and similar publications.”<sup>76</sup>

Dufferin also condemned the extravagant proceedings and demands of the Congress to show that he had no sympathy with the Indian reformers who wanted constitutional changes. “It will of course,” he said, “make the Home Rule party in India very angry, and expose me to a good deal of obloquy and abuse just as I am leaving the country, the echoes of which may reverberate at home, but I thought it would clear the atmosphere and render Lansdowne’s (his successor) position easier and pleasanter.”<sup>77</sup> One thing goes to the credit of Dufferin that he did not shun unpopularity at the time of his departure, though of course, had he so liked, he could have earned a good deal of praise even from Congress quarters had he given some hint of his secret proposals, submitted to the home authorities, for liberalising the provincial councils by extending to those bodies some representative elements. It was a concession which even the most radical sections of the Indian nationalists desired for their country. But the outgoing Viceroy did not give any hint of those proposals which could have, in any case, drawn the home authorities as well as his succeeding Viceroy to a liberal policy which, while raising high expectations among the people, would have nevertheless proved impossible of fulfilment.

75. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/11 B, Dufferin to Cross, 3 December 1888.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.

Thus that Lord Dufferin prepared to leave India, leaving behind him a trail of mystery. There were mixed feelings of suspicion and sympathy towards the departing Viceroy. As the head of the administration who had indirectly given his consent to the formation of the National Congress, and as a liberal who sympathised with Indian aspirations for representative institutions, Lord Dufferin could have earned for himself as much public esteem as Lord Ripon; but, either he missed his opportunities because of his failure to appreciate the new developments, or he represented the true spirit of an alien Government which in its very nature stood to dislike any challenge from the side of the Indian people. Dufferin was small enough to adjust himself to a situation forced upon him by circumstances beyond his control.

At the daybreak on 3 December 1888, Dufferin's successor Lansdowne reached Bombay, and spent three days at Malabar Point as the guest of Lord Reay. The outgoing Viceroy was packing up in Calcutta while, at that time, the National Congress was preparing for its next session at Allahabad to the great annoyance of the Lieutenant-Governor of the province, Auckland Colvin. Lansdowne's first work on arrival was to know something of the Congress from first hand information from Indian leaders themselves. Lord Reay, a friend of the Congress at its first session in Bombay, made arrangements for the new Viceroy to meet at his residence a good number of the leading gentlemen of Bombay—Hindus, Muslims and Parsees, some representing conservative ideas and others representing more advanced shades of public opinion. "Several of them spoke to me very freely with regard to the Congress movement," he reported home. "I was struck by the fact that more than one of them had begun by associating themselves with the proceedings of the Congress, and has ceased to do so in consequence of the line which had been recently taken by the more intemperate advocates of reform, while, on the other hand, several of those who had not severed their connection with the movement, and who intend to take part in the approaching Congress at Allahabad, admitted to me, that they thought a great mistake had been made, in preferring demands of so extreme a character as those recently put forward; and above all, in allowing



the Congress to become connected in the public estimation with disaffection and the promotion of sedition.”<sup>78</sup> Those who met the new Viceroy just on his arrival on the soil of India could not have perhaps spoken anything otherwise. Lansdowne considered Dufferin’s St. Andrews’ Dinner speech as remarkable because it “exposed unsparingly the folly and impracticability of some of the pretensions of the Congress party.” The new Viceroy satisfied himself that moderate influence would prevail upon the Congress and that the extremists would feel discouraged. “I am not without hopes that the coming Congress may prove a new departure in the history of the movement,” he felt.<sup>79</sup>

On 10 December 1888, Dufferin left Calcutta. His successor entered the capital and was given an impressive reception. By the end of the month the fourth session of the Congress was meeting at Allahabad, with George Yule elected to the chair.

A former sheriff of Calcutta, Yule was known as a sympathiser of the people. But it was not the sympathy of the non-official individuals, however distinguished, which the nationalists craved for. They were primarily concerned with the attitude of the official world. By the time the Congress met at Allahabad the Government attitude towards it was already known to be hostile. Auckland Colvin, the head of the province, did not want that the Congress should meet anywhere in his vast domain. His subordinates made it difficult for the Congress reception committee to function smoothly. Colvin’s charge against the Congress was that it ‘unfairly claimed to represent the Indian population’.<sup>80</sup> Allan Octavian Hume, who fully grasped the implication of such an attitude, tried to expose the role of the ‘ill-advised officials who clung to the pestilential doctrine of *Divide et Impera*’.<sup>81</sup>

President Yule tried to pacify the Congress. “All movements of this kind,” he declared, “in which we are concerned

78. LP, B.P. 7/17, Lansdowne to Cross, 11 December 1888.

79. Ibid.

80. B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *History of Indian National Congress*, Vol. I, 65.

81. Ibid,

pass through several phases as they run their course. The first is one of ridicule. That is followed . . . by one of abuse . . . The final stage of all is a substantial adoption of the objects of the movement . . . These various stages overlap each other, but between the first and the last the distinction is complete.”<sup>82</sup> The President felt unhappy at the unmannerly behaviour of the bureaucracy towards a national political party. He, in his address, tried to draw the attention of Parliament to the principles and programmes of the Congress in order to disabuse their mind from entertaining wrong notions. Side by side, he also ridiculed the callousness of Parliament towards the woes of India. “In the absence of a representative body in India,” he said, “the House of Commons was to play the role of one on our behalf. It was to regard the work as a great and solemn trust committed to it by an all-wise and inscrutable Providence, the duties of which it would faithfully and fully discharge . . . And now what is the actual state of the case? It is summed up in a single sentence. There is no check . . . The 650 odd members who were to be the palladium of India’s rights and liberties have thrown ‘the great and solemn trust of an inscrutable Providence’ back upon the hands of Providence to be looked after as Providence itself thinks best.”<sup>83</sup>

The Allahabad Congress did not hesitate to abandon moderation in its use of words and phrases. The administration was impeached on every conceivable ground. The Government of England was charged with having saddled India with unnecessary but costly civil service, for having forced upon the people a crushingly heavy military expenditure, and for indulging in great waste of India’s money beyond the borders of India.<sup>84</sup> Even the people of England were charged on the ground that those who allowed oppression shared the crime. The very principles on which the British rule stood were questioned. Pherozeshah Mehta thought of the earlier generations of British statesmen who felt that even for the Orientals an absolute despotism was an impossible creed in practical politics. The

82. BML, 8023 aa 45, INC, Address of George Yule, Allahabad, 1888.

83. Ibid.

84. CC, Madan Mohan Malaviya, December 1888,

Congress felt proud of its own growth and importance that it was 'increasing day by day, in power and extent, pushing aside by its own great weight the opposing forces of envy and scorn'. It was also a matter of satisfaction that it was able to draw 'various peoples of the country into one common fold of mutual sympathy and goodwill'.

The Congress at Allahabad reiterated its demand for an enquiry into the Indian affairs by a Parliamentary Committee.<sup>85</sup> It strongly disapproved of the 'recent enhancement of the Salt Tax'.<sup>86</sup> It also resolved that "As it is the general belief of the people of this country, that the existing system of police administration in India is highly unsatisfactory in itself and oppressive to them, the Government is respectfully urged to appoint a Commission, consisting of official and non-official members, to investigate the entire question as speedily as possible."<sup>87</sup>

It was only to be expected that the Allahabad Congress would not remain silent over the provocative speech of the Viceroy who had just left India. The myth about his goodness was at an end. What had shocked the leaders was that Dufferin should have condemned the Congress in his last days in India after having shown his sympathies earlier. Eardley Norton circulated an 'Open Letter to Lord Dufferin', in which he criticised the Viceroy in severe terms. The Indian Press was critical of him for his changed attitude. Even in the English Press, there were comments regarding his wrong assessment of the Indian situation. For example, the *Sussex Daily News* reported:

"Lord Dufferin will probably regret the farewell speech, in which he spoke in such slighting terms of the pretensions of the Natives of India to share in the government of their own country, when he reads the inaugural address of the President of the Congress which was delivered this week at Allahabad. Lord Dufferin went out to India a Liberal and an Earl; he has returned—so far as the administration of that Empire is concerned—a reactionary and a Marquis. The exchange is a dear one. More than a thousand delegates from different parts of India

85. INC, Resolution XI, 1888.

86. INC, Resolution XV, 1888.

87. INC, Resolution V, 1888.

were present at the Congress, representing all sects, classes, and religions. Mahomedans and Buddhists sat side by side, their religious differences sunk in their patriotic aspirations. This circumstance is in itself enough to prove that Lord Dufferin was mistaken when he said that the fact of the people of India being divided into so many cults was in itself an insuperable barrier to national homogeneity. Lord Dufferin also asserted with much emphasis that the population at large took not the slightest interest in the questions raised by the Congress. This statement is strangely at variance with the account telegraphed over by Reuter's correspondent . . .'<sup>88</sup>

It was pointed out in certain sections of the Press that the British were actually face to face with a national movement, and not merely with a knot of busybodies, anxious to bring themselves into notice by airing a number of academic questions in which no interest was felt by the majority of the people. Many were impressed by the moderate nature of the demands put forward by the Congress Presidents and leaders. To some, India appeared as a land, soaked with the spirit of conservatism. Her climate, her government, had all combined to produce a patient and long-enduring frame of mind among her people. It was that state of mind which, if not appreciated properly, ran the risk of being diverted in other directions. In apprehension of all such things, Lord Dufferin's criticism of the Congress was considered by some people as unwise and uncalled for.

Auckland Colvin was also criticised in a small section of the English Press for his hostile attitude towards the Congress. "We have already drawn attention to the fact," wrote *The Echo*, "that the Congress met at an Indian capital, wherein resides one of the Congress's most resolute and bitter opponents, namely, Sir Auckland Colvin, Lieutenant Governor of the North-Western Provinces. But an ex-catspaw of the Egyptian bond-holder (Sir Auckland was, for a time, one of the two representatives of the Dual Control) was scarcely likely to sympathise with the aspirations of another subject race.'<sup>89</sup>

It was soon after Allahabad Congress that Allan Octavian

88. BML, 8023 J 31, Comments of the Press, *Sussex Daily News*.

89. Ibid, *The Echo*.

Hume wrote his famous letter to Lord Ripon in England describing to him Dufferin's earlier sympathy for the proposed Congress before its inception, and his subsequent unreasonable hostility towards that organisation.\*

Two things alarmed him at that moment; first that Dufferin would carry on an anti-Congress propaganda in England, and secondly, his successor Lansdowne would try to suppress the Congress movement in India. "I do not suppose," Hume wrote to Ripon, "that Lord Dufferin will ever venture to attack me or the Congress, in the House of Lords though he was weak enough to say that he should express his opinions there on 'the present unsatisfactory state of the country consequent on my unprincipled agitation' but if in any fit of madness he should, I look to you not to let the attack pass unchallenged . . ." <sup>90</sup> Regarding the second issue, information reached Hume that Lord Lansdowne had decided to pass a law making it penal to belong to the Congress or to keep or join in circulating any of its publications or reports. The authenticity of such reports was yet uncertain. "I believe," said Hume, "it has originated thus—Lord Dufferin wrote to the Marquis of Salisbury saying that he should like to suppress it but that in the face of a free press it would be difficult. What had Salisbury said in reply I do not know. Lord Dufferin also left a lengthy note on record for Lord Lansdowne recommending the suppression of the Congress . . . But I cannot believe that any sane man would decide upon such a step, within a few weeks of his arrival, in the face of the marvellous and most orderly success of the late Congress which has astonished foes as much as it has pleased friends . . . God only knows to what length the folly of officials in India may go. But what I hope and trust is that if there be any such barefaced unconstitutional action, you will denounce it as it deserves alike to the country and in the House of Lords and really stand by us." <sup>91</sup>

The new Viceroy, in fact, did not think of such drastic steps as the suppression of the Congress. From Calcutta he was keenly watching the proceedings of the Congress at Allaha-

\* Hume's letter of 13 January 1889, earlier referred to.

90. RP, Add. Mss. 43616, Hume to Ripon, 13 January 1889.

91. Ibid.

bad. He considered the address of the Congress President George Yule as 'unobjectionable both in manner and matter'. But, he wanted to see whether the Congress would take steps to repudiate or discourage the more violent utterances indulged in by others. The Congress, on its part, sent requests to the Viceroy to receive a small deputation which was to come from Allahabad to Calcutta to lay before him the Resolutions adopted at that session. "I have declined," noted the Viceroy, "to receive this deputation mainly for the reason that were I to do so immediately after Lord Dufferin's speech, my action would probably be construed as indicating a marked divergence from his policy, and perhaps as an implied rebuke to Sir Auckland Colvin, in whose Province the Congress is sitting, and who has, as you know, declared himself strongly on the anti-Congress side. It would be very difficult to convince the natives that by receiving such a deputation I was not placing the Congress to some extent under Government patronage, and, however guarded and colourless my reply to its address might have been, sentiments which I am far from entertaining would probably have been attributed to me."<sup>92</sup> If the Viceroy was not willing to entertain the Congress resolutions, the Congress resolved that the Government of India should forward the whole series of its resolutions for the consideration of Her Majesty's Government at home. Lansdowne agreed to do it in the usual manner without making any comments upon the resolutions or discussing them officially, but just forwarding them with a covering despatch. "It appears to me," he felt, "that if the Congress will content itself with the academical discussions of such questions, and will avoid the dissemination of seditious matter, we can afford to treat its proceedings with good-humoured indifference. I am, however, by no means persuaded that its adherents throughout the country are keeping within these limits, and we shall have to watch their action very closely."<sup>93</sup>

The echo of the Allahabad Congress was heard in the House of Commons. Some Members knew of the controversial speech

92. LP, B.P. 7/17, Lansdowne to Cross, 1 January 1889.

93. Ibid, 13 March 1889.

of Lord Dufferin as well as of the Allahabad rejoinder to it. Side by side, they were aware of the growing importance of the Congress organisation. Charles Bradlaugh reported that the Allahabad session had been attended by nearly 1,500 delegates. "They met loyally as they always have done; they were moderate, as they always are," he said.<sup>94</sup> He raised the issue of Dufferin's speech to argue that it was given publicity in England with a view to causing mischief. In an attempt to minimise that mischief he explained:

"I think Lord Dufferin said he regarded with approval and goodwill the natural ambition manifested at these Congresses to be associated with the English rulers in connection with their domestic affairs. I understand that he regarded them as so laudable that in 1886 he tendered to them his hospitality, and I fancy, although I have not the smallest right to put myself forward in any way as the interpreter of what Lord Dufferin might possibly say if he were here, I think I shall not be doing him an injustice if I say he would as strongly repudiate as I repudiate the notion that these Congresses are other than loyal, fair, sincere, real, and praiseworthy political gatherings, the encouragement of which by the Government must tend to facilitate the reforms which Lord Dufferin has said he regards with approval, and which other statesmen have regarded with approval."<sup>95</sup>

Bradlaugh believed in harmony, not in discord. To him, it was time that the British Government was prevailed upon by progressive forces to agree to make declaration in Parliament regarding its attitude towards the Congress. But, declaration on any controversial issue concerning imperial interests was usually made in a language which meant either everything or nothing. Since a categorical announcement on behalf of the Cabinet could not be withheld any longer, the Under Secretary of State for India, John Gorst, was obliged to say on 22 February 1889:

"I have never been instructed by my noble Friend the Secretary of State to say a word against the aspirations of any

94. PP, Commons, Charles Bradlaugh, 22 February 1889.

95. Ibid.

native in India to take part in the Government of that country. Moreover, I venture to say that no responsible official of the Government of India has said anything which could discourage any loyal and proper aspiration on the part of any individual in India to take part in the Government of India. What has been found fault with, both by Lord Dufferin and other high officials in India, notably Sir Auckland Colvin, is not the Congress, but the action of some of the people by whom the Congress is supported, the language of some of the newspapers which profess to write in the interests of the Congress, and the character of some of the pamphlets published in India under the sanction of some of those who took part in the Congress. That is all that has ever been denounced by any official of the Crown.”<sup>96</sup>

If the Congress was a loyal body, but the associations which the Congress encouraged were disloyal, Parliament wanted to know the nature of that disloyalty. After the Allahabad Congress it came to its notice that a certain publication called the ‘Congress Catechism’ was printed in India in as many as twelve languages and was ‘circulated by millions amongst the Hindu people’.<sup>97</sup> The writing was in the form of a dialogue between a *Maulvi* and a peasant and it contained the following:

“Rambaksh: But surely you don’t want us to join together and fight with the Sirkar? If we killed all the Europeans how should we get along? All would be anarchy, as I remember when I was young. You cannot mean this.

“Maulvi Fariduddin: God forbid! This would be a sin. Why should we kill the poor Europeans? Many of them are really good men . . . and God forgive those amongst them who dislike and despise us, and care nothing what becomes of us.”<sup>98</sup>

Some Members felt that steps should be taken to punish the authors and the distributors of those papers. But Bradlaugh pointed out that the dialogue in question was not to be found in the ‘Congress Catechism’ at all, but that it was contained in a separate and distinct publication entitled ‘Conversations’.<sup>99</sup> The Under Secretary of State gave a clarification that though

96. PP, Commons, John Gorst, 22 February 1889.

97. Ibid, see Question of Colonel Hughes, 4 March 1889.

98. Ibid.

99. Ibid, Charles Bradlaugh, 4 March 1889.



the dialogue was not in the body of the 'Catechism' itself, yet it was in one of the two separate pamphlets circulated together with the former. The House was informed that Lord Dufferin believed that the so-called 'Conversations' were "manifestly intended to excite the hatred of the people against the public servants of the Crown."<sup>100</sup> It may be noted here that the literature which appeared so bad to Dufferin, was in no way objectionable to Hume. "I submit," he said, "that when read as they stand, there is not one of you who will not agree that they are loyal and kindly alike in spirit and in word."<sup>101</sup>

Bradlaugh pressed for a more definite answer as regard to the Government policy towards the Indian National Congress. "May I ask," he challenged, "whether the late Viceroy (Dufferin) has not in express terms declared his belief in the desire of the National Congress to work loyally in bringing about internal reforms?"<sup>102</sup> In reply, John Gorst made the following interesting announcement: "On behalf of the Secretary of State, I may say that the Government are not desirous of joining in an indiscriminate condemnation of the Congress."<sup>103</sup>

Indiscriminate condemnation was not indeed considered a sound policy to be adopted by Parliament towards the Congress movement. But, the Government of India on the other hand adopted appropriate measures to keep a watch on that organisation as if it constituted a hostile band of political agitators whose activities harmed the stability of the British administration. In April 1889, Bradlaugh demanded to know if "Colonel E.P. Henderson, for some years in charge of Thuggee investigation, had been put on special duty, including watching the Indian National Congress leaders," and if so, "on what grounds loyal persons engaged in a moderate and constitutionally conducted reform movement were subjected to the espionage of an experienced Thuggee Official?"<sup>104</sup> The Cabinet pleaded ignorance of such developments. Bradlaugh and his friends further pointed out that the Indian bureaucracy and its supporters had

100. PP, Commons, John Gorst, 4 March 1889.

101. SD, see A.O. Hume on Aims and Objectives of Congress, 30 April 1888.

102. PP, Commons, Bradlaugh, 4 March 1889.

103. Ibid, John Gorst, 4 March 1889.

104. Ibid, Charles Bradlaugh, 11 April 1889.

already launched their campaign against the Congress leaders in the Press which was likely to lead to mutual accusations between opposite groups. The conduct of the *Calcutta Review* was brought to the notice of Parliament; H.D. Phillips, himself an under secretary to the Government of Bengal, was working as the editor of that journal, and permitted 'strong party attacks on persons of position and repute in India' and published matters under the authority of his name. It was against the official conduct of a Government servant, and the Secretary of State was called upon to direct the Government of India to pay attention to it.<sup>105</sup>

Throughout 1889 the question before Parliament remained whether or not to condemn the Congress. On behalf of the Congress, William Digby, calling himself the Agent in England of the Indian National Congress, tried to convince the grand old statesman of England, W.E. Gladstone that the British attitude towards the Congress should rest on a rational basis. He met that great leader in April 1889. "I have always had goodwill towards the Indian people and have done for them, from time to time, all that has seemed to me possible," assured Gladstone while receiving Digby. The latter's purpose was to convey the desire of the Indian leaders that they wanted Gladstone to be acquainted with their great organisation. "As for the Congress itself, I want, if possible," said Digby, "to make it clear to you that if ever there was any organisation in the British Empire which deserved the hearty support of all British Liberals, it is this of the Congress. From the first day of its establishment until now nothing of violence, of intimidation, of sedition, has marked any part of its proceedings. It has asked for moderate reforms, it has asked for them in moderate language, it has acted in a peaceable and constitutional manner. The Congress wants a measure of representation of varied interests, through election by qualified persons. It has been perfectly loyal. Indeed, I am speaking sober truth when I say there is no loyalty in the British dominions more sincere than that of the Indian reformers. They do not want to drive the British out of India."<sup>106</sup>

105. PP, Commons, see Questions, 15 April 1889.

106. BML, 8023 J 31, William Digby's Interview with W.E. Gladstone, 8 April 1889.

Gladstone first wanted to ascertain if there was a sentiment of nationality in India. Digby narrated at length what he saw, felt and experienced in that matter; how in their race the people differed from one another as much as the Spaniard differed from the Norwegian and how the Sikh and the Madrasi had scarcely anything in common; yet, how they were all content to be called Indians, to assemble as citizens of one empire, and to call themselves by the generic term of Indians. "A real Indian nationality has sprung into existence in India, thanks, chiefly to the one head of British authority and to the principles of rule carried out . . . The Congress also has done its part in bringing about what has already been achieved."<sup>107</sup>

Gladstone's second question was if the Indian loyalty to the administration was not affected by the new movement "Referring again to what you say about the loyalty of the Congress," asked the Liberal leader, "there must, of course, among such a number of people as live in India, be some who are disloyal and disaffected. Now I should suppose that such an organisation as the Congress would naturally absorb these men . . . they want opportunity to express themselves, here is such an opportunity. I should not think any worse of the Congress if it were so, so long as these men did not dominate its policy, so long as they were kept in their place."<sup>108</sup>

It was an intelligent query. Digby tried to assure that disloyal men had not actually been members of any of the Congress. No doubt there were disaffected persons in the empire, but their number was not very many, and they did not desire to enter the Congress since they were not in favour of constitutional courses which the Congress followed. "But they could attend the Congress meetings if they chose, and take part in the proceedings, could they not?" asked Gladstone. "No Sir, Certainly not. No one attends the Congress as delegate who is not elected by some association—or organisation in sympathy with reforms, or at some public meeting. A delegate has to produce his credentials before he is admitted . . ."<sup>109</sup>

107. BML, 8023 J 31, William Digby's Interview with W.E. Gladstone, 8 April 1885

108. Ibid.

109. Ibid.

It is doubtful if Gladstone was convinced on this. His another doubt was if the Congress was a representative body! "That is the very essence of its existence," emphasised Digby. "It is that or it is nothing."<sup>110</sup>

Gladstone was nearing the end of his long career when he was being persuaded to understand the role of the Indian National Congress. Obviously, his attitude towards that new organisation could not take any definite form. As a member of Parliament he took only a casual interest in Indian developments, though, in times of need, his words carried weight with many. Both the Conservatives and Liberals banked on those words to help their respective purposes. For the progressives like Charles Bradlaugh, it was time to highlight the Congress and its work for a political understanding at the appropriate political level. The character of the House of Commons at that time was somewhat different from what it was before. Even, a thorough Conservative like Richard Temple admitted in 1889 that "the new democracy under the recently extended franchise has returned more Members to the House of Commons who are acquainted with Indian matters than there have ever been in any previous Parliament."<sup>111</sup> It was to that more democratic Commoners that the radicals like Bradlaugh wanted to carry conviction that the Congress in India deserved a more serious consideration. "It is quite time," canvassed one of the prominent members of Parliament, Justin McCarthy, "that we now at last hear and listen to the views of the Indians themselves. As I understand the movement, that and nothing more is what the Indian Congress desires and demands; its members only ask to be allowed to make known the views of the population of India from those populations themselves. They are willing, when that has been done, to submit those demands to the clear commonsense, the impartiality, and the justice of the English people . . . You must have the voice of India. You must know what its populations wish for themselves and claim for themselves, and till you hear that voice speaking to you directly, as people unto people, you cannot possibly hope to govern

110. BML, 8023 J 31, William Digby's Interview with W.E. Gladstone, 8 April 1889.

111. PP, Commons, Richard Temple, 2 August 1889.

with stability and with safety a great country like India.”<sup>112</sup>

In the last week of December 1889 the National Congress met in its fifth session in Bombay with William Wedderburn as its President. Charles Bradlaugh came from England to attend that Congress. Wedderburn was a known friend of India. In the estimate of many leaders he stood second only to Allan Octavian Hume. With an Indian career spanning thirty years, holding such high offices as a high court judge, he was known as a benefactor of the people. “India,” he was reputed to have said, “has given bread and the means of distinction to me and my forbears. It is only by serving her sons that I can repay my debt to her.”<sup>113</sup>

Wedderburn felt greatly overwhelmed by the measure of confidence he received from the Indian people, and he rejoiced to take part in a movement so well calculated to promote ‘the best interests of India and of England’. He felt sorry to review the situation in England, where the organised forces were in the hands of the opponents of the Congress. “The India Office is strong against us, together with the influence of the services and of society. The London Press is not favourable to us. And those members of Parliament who have Indian experience rank themselves mostly on the official side,” declared Wedderburn.”<sup>114</sup> He was, however, confident that the spirit of the age was on the side of the Congress. The forces of ‘new democracy’ were in favour of national aspirations. There was a consciousness among working men in Britain that justice should be done to India. “And if the older organisations are against us, we have younger organisations which are making good and healthy growth. First and foremost, the Indian National Congress is becoming a household word in England; and it will become a power in the State, if you continue to be patient, persistent, moderate.”<sup>115</sup>

The President was happy that a Congress Agency was

112. BML, 8023 aa 45, INC, Miscellaneous Utterances, Justin McCarthy, M.P. 1889.

113. CC, 40-49.

114. BML, 8023 aa 45, INC, Fifth Session, Address of William Wedderburn, Bombay, 1889.

115. Ibid.

working in England. It brought Indian questions to her friends in that country, and briefed those friends when they took up Indian subjects either in Parliament or before the public. The Agency was, to a large extent, the nucleus around which an 'Indian party' was to gradually gather itself, to be styled as 'Indian Parliamentary Party'.\*

The presence of Charles Bradlaugh at the Bombay session was considered a memorable occasion for the Congress. He was already known as a champion of the Indian cause in British Parliament. In the previous year, it was said, he had handled more Indian matters than in any previous year, and in 1889, he was already a sinking man. "There was a pathetic fitness in the advice which sent the sorely shaken man to India to recover, if it might be, health wherewith to work," wrote his daughter.<sup>116</sup> When he reached Bombay on 23 December he was far from convalescence. The grand reception which he received no doubt electrified him into some strength. In the Congress hall, three thousand spectators were added to the two thousand delegates for the occasion of his coming. The whole multitude rose to their feet *en mass* to cheer him as he appeared on the platform. The stricken orator delivered a short and serious address. It was "a grave oration, touched with the tremor of recent suffering and restrained by the sense of broken strength, but full of greatness and dignity—a speech worthy of the man and of the occasion, weighty and wise in its counsels, urging patience, and disclaiming praise."<sup>117</sup>

"I am only here," said Bradlaugh, "as a visitor by your courtesy, a member of a great assembly, the Mother of Parliaments in the world, of which I am one of the poorest members . . . Born of the people, trusted by the people, I will die of the people. And I know no geographical or race limitations.

"I would remind you, as an encouragement to you to be patient, that in England great reforms have always been slowly

\* Only three weeks before the Bombay Congress of 1889, in a meeting at the National Liberal Club, under the Chairmanship of George Yule, the first steps were taken towards the formation of such a party.

116. *Charles Bradlaugh: His Life and Work*, Vol. II, 409-10.

117. *Ibid*,

won. Those who first enterprised them were called seditious, and sometimes sent to gaol as criminals; but the speech and thought lived on. No imprisonment can crush a truth; it may hinder it for a moment, it may delay it for an hour, but it gets an electric elasticity inside the dungeon walls, and it grows, and moves the whole world when it comes out. Your presence here today confutes and answers in anticipation one sneer that I have heard spoken within the walls of Parliament. It is said: 'There is no Indian Nation, there can be no Indian National Congress; there is no Indian people, there are only two hundred millions of diverse races and diverse creeds'. The lesson I read here is that this Congress movement is an educational movement, hammering upon the anvil of millions of men's brains, until it welds into one common whole men whose desire for political and social reforms is greater than all distinctions of race and creed . . .

"You are the dawn; I see the day; and I do not count the rays which are yet below the horizon, but I take account of the gilding of the clouds from the rays that I see.

"I feel that I should like to have the title that some have given me in sneer, and some in hearty meaning, of 'Member for India'." <sup>118</sup>

Bradlaugh advised the Congress not to expect too much, not to expect everything all at once, and not to feel disappointed if, of a just claim, only something was conceded. The Congress had a consitutional right, he advised, to send petitions to Parliament. "I would ask you," he assured, "if you want to make me really your mouthpiece in that House, send signatures to petitions which you understand, by the thousand, by the hundred thousand, by the million, if you can." <sup>119</sup>

The impression which Bradlaugh created was profound. The Congress found in that distinguished Member of Parliament a genuine friend, who did not fear his own Government in voicing the grievances of India. Whether he had a following in the Commons or not was a different matter. All that mattered was that he was prepared to carry the words of the Congress

118. CC, Bradlaugh's speech at Congress Reception, December 1889,

119. Ibid,

to the Commons more earnestly than ever before. Madan Mohan Malaviya summed up the feelings of the delegates towards him in the following words:

“Fawcett and Bright\* are dead and gone, but their names are embalmed in our memories, and will be bequeathed as pious legacies to after-generations. And if I am permitted to take a glance into the future, and to anticipate the verdict of history, this I will say with confidence, that in the coming times no English name will occupy a higher, a worthier, a more affectionate place in our grateful recollections than that of Charles Bradlaugh.”<sup>120</sup>

For many reasons the Bombay Congress of 1889 was a grand success. But Lord Reay wrote to the Secretary of State that ‘the Congress this year has been very tame’, while pointing out at the same time that its resolution on Permanent Settlement carried very serious implications. The Viceroy himself reported in anxiety: “I observe with some concern the announcement that the Congress intends to take up seriously the question of agitating for a Permanent Settlement for the whole of India. I foresee considerable danger from a movement of this kind. You will remember how completely the Irish agitation failed until it occurred to the leaders to obtain for it a new motive-power by combining agrarian with political grievances. We may find ourselves face to face with a similar combination here.”<sup>121</sup>

While the intentions of the Congress on economic matters caused concern to the authorities, the Congress took Bradlaugh’s indications seriously and proceeded to prepare a skeleton scheme for constitutional reforms. It had resolved that “the President of this Congress do submit the same to Charles Bradlaugh, Esq., M.P., with the respectful request of this Congress that he may be pleased to cause a Bill to be

\* John Bright was an advocate of the Indian cause in Parliament for many years before the Congress was born. Fawcett was also a bitter critic of the Indian administration in the Commons in the pre-Congress days. He used to draw the attention of the House to grave financial abuses in India.

120. CC, Madan Mohan Malaviya, December 1889.

121. LP, B.P. 7/17, Lansdowne to Cross, 31 December 1889.



drafted on the lines indicated in this skeleton scheme and introduce the same in the British House of Commons." The Congress reposed its full confidence in those Members of Parliament who wanted to support the Congress cause and thanked Messrs. Caine and Smith for their excellent stand on Indian Matters.<sup>122</sup>

The Conservative sections in Parliament did not appreciate the method which Bradlaugh adopted to bring the Indian Congress to the door-steps of British Parliament. Some resented his presence at the Congress gathering in his capacity as a Member of Parliament. Some even went to the extent of ridiculing him. To cite an example, it was Richard Temple who said:

"I have no doubt the pious Hindoos in the Congress there almost worshipped him. They believe in the transmigration of souls, and I almost think they must have imagined that the souls of some of the mythological heroes had migrated into the stately form of the hon. Member for Northampton (Charles Bradlaugh)."<sup>123</sup>

In the very nature of things the National Congress at its emergence threw the House of Commons into a good deal of confusion by forcing the parties or persons into different alignments. The pro-Congress members were very few in number. But some of them like W.S. Caine could anticipate within five years of the birth of the Congress that the future destiny of the British Indian empire lay with that body. As early as 1890, he declared, as if, intuitively: "I simply look upon Parliament as holding Indian affairs in trust until this promising child (the Congress) arrives at the age of maturity: and then we shall be glad to give up our trust to our ward."<sup>124</sup> Such notions, however, appeared remote, or even, impossible, to the majority of Englishmen of that time. On the other hand, the echo of the voice of the Indian official world resounded in both Houses of Parliament decrying the Congress in unsympathetic terms. Against such odds, the Congress President in 1890, Pherozeshah Mehta, felt bold to say: "We have survived ridicule, abuse and misrepresentation. We have survived the

122. INC, Resolution IV, 1889.

123. PP, Commons, Richard Temple, 14 August 1890.

124. CC, W.S. Caine in the Sixth Congress, Calcutta, 1890.

charge of sedition and disloyalty. We have survived the charge of being a microscopic minority. We have also survived the charge of being guilty of the atrocious crime of being educated, and we have even managed to survive the grievous charge of being all Babus in disguise.”<sup>125</sup> Indeed, the Congress had survived all the initial charges, but the charges persisted nevertheless. Lord Randolph Churchill thought it desirable to announce from his high position a piece of sound advice to the Indian leaders. “I can sincerely remark,” he said, “that no one will more rejoice than myself if the deliberations of the Indian National Congress were to contribute effectually to the progress and the welfare of the Indian people.”<sup>126</sup> In reply to such insinuation that the Congress did not serve any useful purpose, President Mehta declared:

“We have shown that people who indulge in such vain talk have never understood the laws of human progress, which, after all, is a series of experiments in which men and institutions react upon each other for their mutual improvement and perfection.”<sup>127</sup>

The official Anglo-Indian view, which men like Randolph Churchill most faithfully upheld, did not recognise the principles which the Congress stood to propagate. Belief in the increasing prosperity of India was so deep in their mind that the Congress appeared to them as an organisation without having any positive purpose to serve. To the sympathisers of the Congress in Parliament, the danger to the empire came not from the Congress but from the official optimists, both in India and in Parliament, who represented mainly the Anglo-Indian services and vested interests. They saw things through rose-hued glasses. They were ‘in the habit of contemplating with deep emotion the wisdom and beauty of their own performances’. And they pretended to possess all knowledge concerning the real conditions of the Indian people. Side by side, it was a prerogative of such people to be above any fear of being discussed. Talking of one such group, William Digby correctly

125. CC, Pherozeshah Mehta, 1890.

126. BML, 8023 aa 45, INC, Miscellaneous Utterances, Lord Randolph Churchill, 1890.

127. Ibid, Sixth Session, Pherozeshah Mehta, 1890.

put it before Gladstone: "District officials in India are such irresponsible despots that they resent all comment on their actions however mild, and call that sedition what probably any unprejudiced person would say fair criticism."<sup>128</sup> To such men in general all over India the Congress was a dangerous body, both in its ideology and action.

But the Congress continued to claim that it was constitutional in its words and deeds. It advanced demands in a constitutional manner. Consequently, Parliament was caught in the traps of constitutionality and felt obliged to debate on the validity of Congress demands.

128. BML, 8023 J 31, William Digby's Interview with Gladstone, 61-67,

## British Parliament and the Congress Demand for Elective System

THE Indian National Congress was born to make demands. The process of political thought which was at the base of political demands was mainly the outcome of a new consciousness which the middle class intelligentsia had imbibed through their education of the political developments in the West. The British Government in India maintained an absolute character in every respect. But the educated Indians knew how Britain was governed. That, with all her institutional glamour, Queen Victoria was a figurehead, that, with all their personal greatness the great Prime Ministers like Disraeli or Gladstone were responsible to an elected Parliament, and that with its unbounded and acknowledged sovereignty Parliament behaved according to the barometer of public opinion—were known to Indians who annually passed through the portals of academic institutions. In brief, the elite knew the functional values of democracy theoretically while tasting the merits or demerits of an absolute government in practice. The theories of Western political science and also lessons of modern European history generated a faith in the virtues of that unseen system called representative government. The faith grew deeper and deeper in an antithetical manner against a prevailing system in which public opinion, popular franchise, elected assemblies and responsible executives had no existence whatsoever. The hiatus,

which the concepts of British ways in Britain and the British ways in India produced and developed, led to a political ferment which was historically inevitable. The Congress demands reflected nothing more than the values and precepts of a system which Englishmen cherished so dearly in their homeland.

In a sense, the values of representative institutions were propagated by some Englishmen themselves in India while assessing the feelings of the Indian elite. Such an assessment called for a liberal attitude on the part of farsighted statesmen who wished well of Britain and India. Lord Ripon was a classic example of that kind of liberalism. Aware of the growth of political consciousness in India, he thought of 'the small beginnings of independent political life', not primarily with a view to effecting improvement in administration, but for political education of a people in useful directions. He declared through his Resolution of 18 May 1882 on the constitution of Local Boards: "As education advances, there is rapidly growing up all over the country an intelligent class of public spirited men, whom it is not only bad policy, but sheer waste of power, to fail to utilise." He further said:

"The task of administration is yearly becoming more onerous as the country progresses in civilisation and material prosperity. The annual reports of every Government tell of an ever-increasing burden laid upon the shoulders of the local officers. The cry is everywhere for increased establishments. The universal complaint in all departments is that of over-work. Under these circumstances it becomes imperatively necessary to look around for some means of relief; and the Governor-General in Council has no hesitation in stating his conviction, that the only reasonable plan open to the Government is to induce the people themselves to undertake, as far as may be, the management of their own affairs; and to develop, or create if need be, a capacity for self-help in respect of all matters that have not, for imperial reasons, to be retained in the hands of the representatives of Government."<sup>1</sup>

The principle of local self-government presupposed the ushering in of such democratic methods such as election, res-

1. SD, Government of India's Resolution, 18 May 1882,

pect for public opinion, responsibility in the hands of elected representatives, however rudimentary to start with. Those ideas, so familiar to all Englishmen, appeared to many of them absurd in Indian context. Indian opinion in matters of administration, it seemed, would contradict the basic character of the British rule. Ripon, as has been shown earlier, was in a minority of one against the vast majority of his countrymen who governed India. Opposition to his theories came as expected. James Fitzjames Stephen wrote in 1883:

“It may be safely asserted that absolute government has its own merits and conveniences; that it is, so to speak, as legitimate a form of government as any other; and that if it exists, if it is well and successfully administered, and if it is suited to the circumstances and tastes of those amongst whom it exists, there is no reason why those who administer it should seek to substitute for it a representative system, or should feel in any respect ashamed of their position as absolute rulers, or desirous to lay it down. Much of the language used about the British Government in India implies, if it does not exactly state, a doctrine which might perhaps be called the doctrine of the Divine Right of Representative Institutions, or of the Sovereignty of the People; it seems to assume that the exercise of absolute power can never be justified except as a temporary expedient used for the purpose of superseding itself and as a means of educating those whom it affects into a fitness for parliamentary institutions . . . I do not in any degree share in this view, whether it is regarded as a doctrine or a sentiment. I do not think that the permanent existence of such a Government as ours in India must in itself be a bad thing; that we ought not to desire its permanence even if we can secure it; and that the establishment of some kind of parliamentary system instead of it is an object which ought to be distinctly contemplated, and, as soon as it is practicable, carried out.”<sup>2</sup>

It is easy to surmise towards which school of thought did the Indian intelligentsia feel attracted in the days of Ripon. The theory of conquest evoked against it the natural aversion

2. SD, James Fitzjames Stephen on the principles of British Government in India, 1883.

of a conquered people. The theory of consent, on the other hand, was appealing especially at a time when its negation was all too apparent. The Congress was born when the leaders of Indian thought understood the values of a representative system and were eager to advance their claims for it.

In its very first session in 1885, the Congress raised the demand for admission of a considerable proportion of elected members to the existing Legislative Councils. The implied principles were that people's representatives should be empowered to check the executive power of the Government and discuss the financial affairs of the State.<sup>3</sup> The Congress knew that the demand for an elective system a larger issue which affected the entire fabric of administration and hence there was no immediate hope of realising it. For practical reasons, therefore, it raised questions of specific character for a change for the better. Matters such as the abolition of the Council of the Secretary of State for India,<sup>4</sup> and the complete separation of executive and judicial functions<sup>5</sup> etc., were raised to end the irrational aspects of the existing frame. The demands of the Congress, on the whole, were like suggestions to remove the keystones from the imperial arch. Parenthetically, they presupposed a new edifice, in accordance with the designs which the Congress felt desirable for a better governance of the country.

After the National Congress had held two sessions, Allan Octavian Hume, who appreciated the value of such demands in a broader perspective of Indo-British interests, requested Lord Ripon to carry to the English mind "the conviction that India's demand for freer institutions and a more constitutional and less arbitrary form of Government, is one that should not be lightly put aside nor hastily negatived. There is yet time to effect a gradual and safe transition from despotic to constitutional institutions, and in so doing, (if it be done wisely, and with a good grace) to bind India to England in lasting bonds of gratitude and love. But if unhappily India's wishes are ignored, and her legitimate aspirations slighted, no man can

3. INC, Resolution III, 1885.

4. INC, Resolution II, 1885.

5. INC, Resolution XI, 1886.

truly measure the magnitude of the untoward consequences likely to ensue and that in not very distant future.”<sup>6</sup> Ripon, as he knew his own countrymen better, was not optimistic. Freer institutions for India were to be a gift of Parliament, but, “Such a House of Commons as this is incapable of carrying about any broad questions of Indian policy, and if they did look at them, all their instincts would carry them in a wrong direction,” wrote Ripon in June 1888.<sup>7</sup>

Ripon’s apprehensions proved almost prophetic in due course when Parliament showed its absolute indifference to the question of free institutions in India.

The Congress demands, however, provided an element of compulsion to Parliament to think. Seldom did the Indian issues call for such serious attention as the Congress proposals. The grave situation in the empire had indeed led to considerable parliamentary interest. But those interests concerned their own affairs and policies, viewed no doubt from different party angles, but ultimately resolved in consideration of Britain’s national interests. The Congress presented a new problem altogether. The demands were from an external body, rather a hostile body, representing ideologies which fundamentally went against the inherent character of a foreign rule. Left to themselves, the hard core of Parliament representing both the great political parties, Conservatives and Liberals, would have liked to close their eyes towards that far-away entity, their ears against their shrill demands, and their lips on any discussion concerning their lot. But, there were in the Commons some difficult members, though a few in number. And, Parliament could not have abandoned its own intrinsic function. It was the supreme virtue of the House of Commons that within its walls any individual, of whatever brand, was free to exercise his inalienable right to force the attention of all members to points raised by him under parliamentary procedures. Once the matter was raised, the House had no opportunity to pass over it in silence or sleep over it indefinitely. A discussion, friendly or acrimonious, was inevitable. That weakness of the House of

6. RP, Add. Mss. 43616, Hume to Ripon, 24 March 1887.

7. Ibid, Ripon to Hume, 16 June 1888. Ripon was writing this letter after a long silence.



Commons proved a source of strength for the Indian National Congress right from the beginning.

At first a few individuals like Charles Bradlaugh made Parliament aware of the Congress demands, forcing upon a reluctant House discussions on valid subjects. Gradually the number of Congress sympathisers in the Commons began to grow. It was William Wedderburn\* who earned the credit for organising an active group in that House, vaguely described as the 'Indian party'. Within ten years of the birth of the Congress, he claimed to have enrolled as many as 160 members in that group. Of course, it was not a compact body. And certainly it was not in any sense committed to Congress demands. But it had its moral authority. In 1894 Wedderburn described the character of that group in the following terms:

"It must be borne in mind that these gentlemen are not pledged to the Congress programme, nor indeed have they promised to support any particular measure. All that they have promised is to support a just and sympathetic policy towards India, and to give a fair hearing to Indian grievances. We must also remember the peculiar composition of the political party, from which the members of this Committee are drawn. The party is made up of groups: Irish, Scotch, Welsh, Metropolitan, Temperance, Labour, Members, whose first duty is to their constituents and supporters. Even those therefore who are best disposed towards India may on any particular occasion find there are considerations which prevent their voting against the Government on an Indian question. The Indian party thus consists of two portions, (a) those who, like the British Committee, are supporters of the Congress programme, and are prepared actively to advocate the cause of India; and (b) those who have not as yet fully mastered the points at issue between Indian public opinion and the dominant officials, but are prepared to give both sides an impartial hearing."<sup>8</sup>

It was thus from the beginning that there were some

\* Wedderburn retired from Indian Civil Service in 1887, became a champion of the Congress cause, presided over the National Congress in Bombay in 1889, and was a Member of Parliament from Banffshire from 1893 to 1900.

8. SD, William Wedderburn on an Indian Party in Parliament, 1894.

members to raise issues and some others to ponder over them. The Indian group, as described by Wedderburn, was in the process of information much before he brought it to the knowledge of others. In any case, the Congress demands came before Parliament as soon as they were voiced in India.

During the eighties of the 19th century when the Congress took shape and advanced its demands, the composition of the House of Commons was slowly beginning to change, with a few 'radicals' making their way into it. Those Members were somewhat uninitiated into the traditional lines of imperial discipline and they alarmed the Conservatives and Liberals alike with their extraordinary ideas. "Fads and crotchets prosper more and more," lamented the Secretary of State for India in 1886, "and maxims of policy, founded on long experience, are treated as 'old world' prejudices. All this will bring about considerable changes. This may not in itself be an evil, as the world does not stand still. What I dread is the instability of temper and the hysterical moods which the nation is subject to, and which seem to me incompatible with the maintenance of a world-wide Empire."<sup>9</sup> It is from among those tradition-breakers that the Indian demands found some vocal supporters.

Before one proceeds to discuss how Parliament took up the Indian demands, it is necessary to note here how, at times, wide differences prevailed between the attitude of the Viceroys who were the men on the spot and the Secretary of State and Prime Ministers who were the men in Parliament. The Viceroy, Dufferin, when he became aware of the primary political hopes of the Indian nationalists, dropped hints to the home authorities as to what he thought about improving Indian legislatures. At once he was cautioned by the Secretary of State Lord Cross who wrote: "I feel quite sure that you will not propose any 'hasty, inconsiderate, or imprudent' change in the Legislative Councils . . . It is a most delicate and difficult subject."<sup>10</sup> Dufferin at first thought of meeting one of the demands of the Indian 'reformers, namely, the right of interpellation, in order to counter all the adverse reports

9. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/6, Kimberley to Dufferin, 19 March 1886.

10. Ibid, F 130/9, Cross to Dufferin, 5 April 1887.

circulated by Indian newspapers. It was through replies to questions that he wanted to contradict criticism against Government.<sup>11</sup> But to home authorities, the right to put questions in course of debates appeared inappropriate. Further, it was a long standing desire in India that Parliament should conduct an enquiry into the manner in which the Indian administration functioned. When the Liberal Government wanted to pay some attention to this proposal in 1886, it faced severe opposition from the Conservative side led by Salisbury and Randolph Churchill and the proposal was dropped.<sup>12</sup>

The Calcutta Congress of 1886 demanded the constitution of a Royal Commission, Legislative Councils for N.W. Provinces and the Punjab, enlargement of Legislative Councils, and Indian representation in Parliament, etc. Dufferin, whether he liked the Congress or not, wanted to take steps towards legislative reform, and wanted to know the thinking of the Cabinet in this regard. "No," reiterated Viscount Cross, "I am not in the least alarmed at your suggestion as to applying the elective principle to some of your Indian Councils. My remarks were made with a view of showing you that in such a matter the greatest caution was necessary . . . I was quite sure that you would agree with me that what really secures the welfare of the Indian people is English justice and English administrative efficiency, and that the ascendancy of both these elements must, under any circumstances, be maintained absolute and pre-eminent, but premising that sufficient care is taken that our majority is secure so as to enable us to legislate for the million who are not noisy and who are uneducated against the more selfish views of the noisy and educated or half-educated, my mind is quite open and large enough carefully and favourably to consider any well matured plan of reform."<sup>13</sup>

Knowing Lord Dufferin to be a liberal and apprehending that he might follow Ripon's examples, Cross reminded him further that party spirit ought not to enter into Indian affairs. Dufferin got the hint alright but at the same time was obliged

11. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/5, Dufferin to Kimberley, 11 June 1886.

12. Ibid, see Kimberley to Dufferin, 21 May 1886.

13. Ibid, F 130/9, Cross to Dufferin, 14 April 1887.

to give serious attention to Indian demands in the interest of future administration. A few months before his departure from India, he wrote to the Secretary of State:

“What I would have proposed, if I had remained a year longer, as I have already mentioned in a previous letter, would have been to liberalise Sir Charles Wood’s constitution by modifying the status of the Provincial Councils, introducing into them a larger, but not a predominating, number of Native Members, and by investing them with the liberty of controlling to a certain extent the local Provincial expenditure. I think if some measure of this kind were to be adopted, a legitimate opportunity would be afforded of getting rid of the Congress, as well as of restricting the abuses of the Native Press. Unless some definite line is taken in these matters, we shall soon have something like a Home Rule organisation established in India, on Irish lines, under the patronage of Irish and Radical Members of Parliament. Now, though all my instincts are essentially liberal, it is quite evident that the Government of India cannot be conducted on constitutional principles. It is and must be a benevolent bureaucratic despotism for many a long year to come. The problem is to prevent the abuses inherent in all despotisms from choking and overpowering its benevolence, and the only way to do this is by the Government giving legitimate facilities to the educated classes to prefer their complaints and make known their wishes. The existing Councils do not afford these facilities.”<sup>14</sup>

After a careful study of the various grievances set forth by Indian leaders in their Congress and in their newspapers, Dufferin felt convinced that the substance of their aspirations centered on liberalisation of the Councils. He, therefore, appointed a Committee ‘to consider the question of enlarging the function of Local Legislative Councils and liberalising their procedure’. The Committee arrived at the following conclusions:

1. It was premature to consider the question of altering the functions or procedure of Governor-General’s Council.
2. That the functions of the Local Legislative Councils

14. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/11 B, Dufferin to Cross, 17 August 1888.

established in Madras, Bombay, and Bengal, to begin with, be increased;

3. That the legislative powers of these Councils remain unaltered; . . .
13. That in providing for the popular element in the Councils regard be had so far as possible to the principle of election.<sup>15</sup>

This report was confidentially sent to the Secretary of State. The Viceroy resisted all temptations to utter a word on the subject so that it might remain an absolute secret till the home authorities made up their mind. "Had I given a hint," he wrote to the Secretary of State, "that my thoughts were running in this direction, I should at once have become a *persona grata* to all but the absolutely disloyal sections, even of the Radical National Party. But until you had granted us your consent to embark upon this line, and had approved the general principles of any plan we might be disposed to submit to you. It would have been disloyal of me to have given the slightest hint of any change being possible in the direction desired, and I would sooner have bitten my tongue out than have done so."<sup>16</sup>

Dufferin did his best to keep his suggestions secret. But, in some mysterious way, it leaked out to the public that he had recommended to the home authorities in favour of the Congress demands for elective principles. That at once led to high expectations in Congress circles in spite of the fact that many were critical of Dufferin's criticism of the Congress. The Allahabad Congress which met soon after Dufferin's departure once again laid emphasis on elective principles. Referring to the reform of the Legislative Councils, President George Yule declared: "I myself regard this one as the most important of all. Each of the other reforms begins and ends with itself. The reforms of the Councils is not only in itself good, but it has the additional virtue of being the best of all instruments for obtaining other reforms that further experience and our growing wants may lead us to desire."<sup>17</sup>

15. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/11 B, See the Report of the Committee, in Dufferin's letter to Cross, 8 October 1888.
16. Ibid, Dufferin to Cross, 4 November 1888.
17. BML, 8023 aa 45, INC, Fourth Session, Address of George Yule, Allahabad, 1888.

Lord Dufferin's confidential despatch on Council Reforms and the Congress demands for the same at Allahabad created a serious problem for the Secretary of State. To the new Viceroy Lansdowne, he wrote: "The Congress is now over . . . I will only add that I was much astonished when Lord Dufferin's Despatch reached me, as in one of his former letters he had stated that he would send nothing officially upon so grave a subject (Legislative Councils) until he had first written privately and had been so able to ascertain how his suggestions were likely to be received by Her Majesty's Government. I am afraid that Despatch may give trouble, and Lord Salisbury is very strongly opposed to its being made public."<sup>18</sup> He discussed the matter with Lord Salisbury who also had a copy of the Report of Lord Dufferin's Committee. On his own account and by the express desire of the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State cautioned the Viceroy that "any recommendation from you should come to me confidentially for the Cabinet before any word is breathed elsewhere."<sup>19</sup>

The Viceroy Lansdowne, on the other hand, just after his arrival, had felt the need for some innovation without delay. Dufferin had explained to him in outline the need for reforms of the Provincial Legislative Councils. The new Viceroy also went through Dufferin's Minute which had been forwarded to the Secretary of State. He came to the conclusion that right of interpellation, carefully restricted, should be given to the Governor-General's Legislative Council, and that the Budget should be regularly discussed in the Council. "I cannot help believing" he had suggested to Lord Cross early in January 1889, "that some step of kind which has been recommended to you (Dufferin's Minute) is called for and would really strengthen the position of those who are governing this country. I am afraid, moreover, that from the moment when the question was brought before the Council by my predecessor it became unlikely that the public would remain entirely unaware of the fact that some scheme of the sort was under the consideration of the Government of India, and I can see

18. LP, B.P. 7/17, Viscount Cross to Lansdowne, 3 January 1889.

19. Ibid, Cross to Lansdowne, 25 January 1889,

from occasional statements, in the newspapers that the secret has to some extent leaked out. There will therefore be some disappointment, if after a time it transpires that we have dropped the project altogether . . . A timely concession of this kind would, I believe, take a great deal of the wind out of the sails of the Congress, if the reform is delayed too long, it will be assuredly regarded as having been extorted from us.”<sup>20</sup>

Lansdowne, with all his conservative leanings, took a realistic approach like Dufferin on that vital subject. New in office, he did not press for reforms. He had, indeed, grave doubts as to the practicability of establishing new systems. But he became anxious that the home authorities ‘should not discourage the idea of reform altogether’. “The moment is very favourable for dealing with the question, and I believe that Lord Salisbury’s Government would be conferring an immense service upon India and upon the empire by dealing with this question rather than leave it unsettled. I tremble when I think of the kind of Indian Reform Bill which a Radical Government may propose if it gets the chance.”<sup>21</sup> Before this appeal of the Viceroy reached the Secretary of State, the latter gave the following significant directive.

“Neither I nor Lord Salisbury are at all inclined to sanction the principle of election. It is really impossible to have a representation of, not the people, but the peoples in India. The Babus would not represent the peoples of India; they would only represent themselves. However, neither Lord Salisbury nor myself see any difficulty about enlarging the number of the Councils so as to allow the Viceroy and the several Governors to make, on their own responsibility, their Councils more representative, without allowing the principle of representation by election.”<sup>22</sup>

The Viceroy was obliged to obey the decision of his superiors that nothing like representation, in the English sense of the word, could be applicable to India. But he could not see the reason why, if it was determined to increase the strength of the Provincial Councils, the Cabinet should not allow some

20. LP, B.P. 7/17, Lansdowne to Cross, 1 January 1889.

21. Ibid, 29 January 1889.

22. Ibid, Cross to Lansdowne, 30 January 1889,

of the members to be elected by selected constituencies such as municipal bodies. Many members of those municipal bodies were themselves elected by tax-payers, and the Provincial Councils were after all only like large municipal corporations, precluded under their constitution from dealing with Imperial questions. Such being the case, the Viceroy did not see any reason why the smaller local municipalities should not be given a voice in determining the constitution of the larger Provincial Councils. The official and nominated element were always to remain in a majority and, the Executive Government was in no way to become less powerful than it was at that time. Everything thus remaining to the advantage of the Government, there was no need for undue fear about negligible elective element in the Councils. This is the line on which Lansdowne began to think as the man on the spot.<sup>23</sup> But, the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State, as the men in Parliament, had their own line of approach.

While the rulers in India and Britain were exchanging their respective lines, Parliament took up the issue for discussion and decision.

It was Charles Bradlaugh who first wanted to ascertain from the Government benches 'how much of the claims which the natives in Congress are making may be conceded without injury to the Empire'. He reminded the House: "It is our duty, if we will govern by force, to make that force as gentle as we can by calling to our aid the millions we have already educated, and who have shown themselves capable of taking part in the Government of their country."<sup>24</sup> The Congress demands for elected members to Legislative Councils appeared too radical to members of both the parties in Parliament. But the Indian sympathisers in Parliament had come to know that the retiring Viceroy, Lord Dufferin had sent a despatch regarding the reform of the Legislative Councils which was said to have contained, in some form, recommendations for elective principles. The Cabinet was taken aback and the Secretary of State felt obliged to decide that the Dufferin recommendations

23. LP, B.P. 7/17, Lansdowne to Cross, 12 February 1889.

24. PP, Commons Charles Bradlaugh, 22 February 1889,



should not be laid on the table of the House since it was not in 'advantage to the Public Service'.<sup>25</sup> But the contents of the despatch were already known to the House. A memorandum signed by William Digby was circulated among the Members of the House of Commons, calling attention to the contents of the Dufferin despatch.<sup>26</sup> In India, too, the recommendations of Dufferin were known in some details. In Congress quarters it was discussed that what the Congress thought of elective systems, the Viceroy too, in principle, considered them necessary, and hence the demands were fair as well as moderate. The memorandum, circulated in Parliament, made a comparison between the recommendations of Lord Dufferin and the demands of the Congress. No doubt his report fell short of the expectations entertained by the Congress. In many respects it was regressive. For example, in his proposals Dufferin wanted to reconstitute the Provincial Councils in order to secure the 'interests of the hereditary nobility and landed classes, who have a great permanent stake in the country'. The report said:

"We therefore recommend that All Rajahs, Maharajahs, and Nawabs whose traditional titles are recognised by the Government, and all landed proprietors of high standing and influence (such as in Bengal, for example, would be secured by a qualification based on the payment of not less than Rs. 50,000 in Revenue to Government), shall have subject to rules to be prescribed in this behalf, the right to vote for the election of one or more of their own class for membership of what may be called the First Division of the Council."<sup>27</sup>

It was, however, the popular part of the Council on which Dufferin's views carried weight both with the Congress and William Digby's friends in Parliament. The following lines were significant:

"The interests of the trading, professional and agricultural classes, which may be regarded as the popular element in the community, may, we think, be best provided for by such an

25. PP, Commons, see J. Gorst, 18 March 1889.

26. Ibid, see Questions, 15 April 1889.

27. SD, Report of Lord Dufferin's Committee on Provincial Councils, October 1888,

approximation to the principle of popular election as the circumstances of the country permit. We are fully aware that in India at present there can be no such thing as popular representation as understood in Western countries; but we think it desirable that in appointing members to the Council, we should not rely solely on nomination; and that some approximation should be made to the elective principle.”<sup>28</sup>

Dufferin recommended the introduction of extremely restricted electoral circles in which ‘the electors should be the members of Municipal Committees and Local Boards as by law established, and in the case of the Universities, the Senate and such graduates as have taken a Master’s or Doctor’s degree in any of the faculties of Arts, Law, Medicine, Engineering, and Oriental Learning’. Similarly, he thought the size of the Legislative Council should be as small as possible. For so large a province like Bengal, he could think of only 6 elected members to represent rajahs and nawabs, and 7 elected members to represent the so-called popular elements in the grand total of a house of only 36. The rest of the members in the House besides the elected members, were nominated and official members. The provincial executives were to retain absolute power over the Councils. Only some nominal functions were prescribed for the latter.

Lord Dufferin’s Minute of November 1888 clearly pointed out that the changes suggested for the Provincial Councils should not be extended to the Governor General’s Supreme Council. Only some minor changes in the internal functions of the Central Legislative were considered necessary. “For my own part,” he said, “I think that a yearly financial discussion in the Viceroy’s Legislative Council would prove a very useful and desirable arrangement, and a very convenient preliminary so the subsequent debate which takes place on Indian finances in the House of Commons later in the year. I do not by this mean that votes should be taken in regard to the various items of the Budget, or that the heads of expenditure should be submitted in detail to the examination of the Council, but simply that an opportunity should be given for

28. SD, Report of Lord Dufferin’s Committee on Provincial Councils, October 1888.

a full, free, and thorough criticism and examination of the financial policy of the Government.”<sup>29</sup> Secondly, the Viceroy recommended that the Members of the Supreme Legislative Council should be permitted to ask questions with reference to current matters of domestic, as distinguished from these of imperial interest, that might have attracted public attention. The Viceroy had explained its purpose thus:

“One of the great dangers of the present situation is the facility with which that section of the Press which is bent upon holding up English Rule to the hatred and contempt of the people can go on day after day attributing to the Government intentions of inaugurating some obnoxious policy, until they have worked up large sections of the community into a state of excitement and alarm; or else of inventing of exaggerating facts, upon which they subsequently comment in a most malicious manner, with the view of producing a disquieting effect upon the public mind, and infusing into a spirit of disloyalty and discontent. Under existing circumstances the Government of India has no means of controlling or neutralizing the effect of these mischievous practices.”<sup>30</sup>

Questions in the supreme legislature and answers by way of explanation were thought necessary in order to correct a wrong impression or controvert a false statement. At least that was what Dufferin believed. The public at large could thereby know the real motive of the Government. The Viceroy made it known that his ideas about reforms were in no way meant to weaken the rule; they were aimed only at liberalisation of the administration.

In substance the Dufferin scheme included the enlargement of Provincial Councils at the very minimum, and introduction of an extremely restricted elective principle. But even that appeared too radical to the British Cabinet, and the Secretary of State therefore did not think it prudent to disclose the contents to Parliament. In the Congress circles, words like ‘election’ appeared to mean too much.

Whether the Congress demanded too much by way of popular

29. SD, Dufferin’s Minute on Central Legislature, November 1888.

30. Ibid.

representation of Dufferin recommended too little in those directions were matters which really involved principles of deeper import. It was not the quantitative aspect of the demand which disturbed Parliament, but the real significance of these changes. So, the members plunged into serious debates on that fundamental issue—did India deserve elective systems?

Before that issue was thrashed out, Parliament, however had to face a specific demand of the Congress, namely, abolition of the Council of the Secretary of State for India. The Congress in its very first session in 1885 expressed that the abolition of the Council of the Secretary of State for India, as it was then constituted, should be considered as the necessary preliminary to all other reforms. Nearly four years latter Parliament took up the matter\* and the Cabinet thought it desirable to reduce the size of that body in the name of economy. As the Commons continued to debate, George Campbell, Member for Kirkcaldy, challenged: "Well, in my opinion, if this be a matter of economy, that economy might be effected in another way by a reduction of the salaries of the Members, instead of a reduction of their numbers . . . The burning point of this most important question is whether we are to have a real Council to control the Secretary of State for India and to act as a buffer between Parliament and India, or to have a limited number of Councillors whose advice the Secretary of State may take or leave."<sup>31</sup> Bradlaugh claimed that "there is no evidence that the Council of the Secretary of State for India keeps itself *en rapport* with the Indian people. And it is perfectly certain that there are no sort of relations between it and the English Parliament. The only thing the Secretary for India does, in answer to questions he may be presented with from different portions of this House, is to give us as little information as he possibly can and when it is of comparatively little use to us. If that is all that the Council for India does, I say there is no justification for its existence . . . It is suggested that people of India regard it as standing between

\* Council of India Bill No. 281.

31. PP, Commons, George Campbell, 2 August 1889,

them and many legitimate reforms, and that they are therefore opposed to its continuance in its present form.”<sup>32</sup>

‘The debate in the Commons exposed the real character of the India Council. It was seen to be playing a negative role, harmful to both India and Britain. It screened from the eyes of the people of England the true nature of the Indian administration. It was described as one of the many contrivances by which Parliament was kept unenlightened on affairs of the empire. The Government of India was supposed to be responsible to Parliament of Britain. But a Council of 15 men standing between the two reduced the weight of official responsibility by successfully keeping Parliament in dark. A reform of the system was therefore thought absolutely necessary, particularly in view of the critical Indians opinion against the existing Council.

It was on the nature of that reform, however, that opinion differed. The Cabinet’s proposal was only to reduce the size of the Council. But as J.G. Swift MacNeill, a sympathiser of the Indian cause, declared:

“I look upon it as a feeble attempt to change the administrative system of India, while I cannot help thinking that any effort to grapple with the reform of Indian administration ought to be complete, final, and far-reaching. Now, Sir, this is a proposal to reduce the number of members of the India Council from 15 to 10. . . . To reform the Government of India by knocking five men off the present number of the India Council is simply to give a shabby coat of moral whitewash to the sepulchre of corruption and misgovernment in India.”<sup>33</sup>

Advocates of the India Council referred to the ‘Indian experience’ of its learned members while to its opponents, it was a vague qualification. It was said that a travel for a few months in India by an honourable member could pass as ‘Indian experience’. Even if that experience counted, what power did the members enjoy? They had indeed a right to enter a protest if they did not approve of the action of the Secretary of State.

32. PP, Commons, Charles Bradlugh, 2 August 1889.

33. Ibid, Swift MacNeill, 2 August 1889,

But surprisingly enough, from 1858 when the Council was established, down to the year 1889, there was not even a single protest on their part. A more vital question than that remained to be considered. "Should all the 15 object to the action of the Secretary for India, they have no power to stop him; he can carry the day in spite of them. In fact, they seem to do nothing but receive their salary."<sup>34</sup>

The India Council was considered useless by the radical Members of the Commons, who wanted its reform as a matter of immediate need. But to the Conservative Government, while on principle reform was not objectionable, the nature of reform which they thought necessary was so peculiar that it almost meant nothing. In course of the debate one Member pointedly drew the attention of the House to a great defect of the Indian administration as compared to the administration of England that the empire lacked an expressive body of upper middle class and middle class, while the people in England were 'a compact, well-organised body right through the social system from the Sovereign to the masses'. The Viceroy had no means of consulting the Indian opinion or receiving suggestions on any major or delicate question of taxation or political change. Some sort of a council in India resembling the Privy Council in Britain, with Indian gentlemen of the highest position could serve a very useful purpose. But that, of course, was not the question before Parliament. What appeared quite plausible to some at the moment was the reconstitution of the India Council with a few Indian members included. It was argued:

"As the India Council is mere a consultative body, it might also be of advantage to introduce two, or probably more, experienced, trained, and highly-placed natives of India on it, so as to more amalgamate the Home and Eastern opinions into that Indian Empire, which is after all, as Mr. Disraeli said, a matter of considerable importance to this country."<sup>35</sup>

Theoretically, the powers of the India Council were immense. But there was no answer to the questions raised: for

34. PP, Commons, Swift MacNeill, 2 August 1889.

35. Ibid, Lewis Pelly, 2 August 1889.

whom did the Council legislate and whom did it advise? The Government wanted to rush through the Commons the small measures of reforms at the fag end of the session with only a few member present and the Under Secretary of State for India who pioneered the Bill absent. The sympathisers of India from Opposition benches appealed to the instincts of the Conservatives 'as gentlemen and Christians and human beings' not to treat India that shabbily as they were doing. The supporters of the Government argued that the 'Indian affairs are not administered on party principle'. And, E. Stanhope, the Secretary of State for War in the Conservative Cabinet, replied on behalf of the Under Secretary of State for India that the India Council was doing its very best in what it thought best for the good of India. The real merit of the Council was that its members were perfectly independent of the Government of the day. In the second place, it was chosen from men of Indian experience, men who have had experience in all parts of India, so that at any given time there are members of the Council who have had experience of any part of India concerned in any particular matter'. They were also supposed to be men entirely independent of the party politics. "That is of foremost consequence to the Government of India, and anything tending to a diminution of that independence of Party politics would inflict a grave harm upon the Government of India." Finally, "as to the proposal for native representation on the Council of the Secretary of State, that is a suggestion I am sure no hon. Member could make who has thought out the objections and consequences."<sup>36</sup>

Hopes for a 'much more thorough reform' of the India Council were belied. Ultimately on 24 August 1889, with 40 members being present in the Commons, the Bill was read the third time and passed.<sup>37</sup>

The Congress demanded the abolition of the Council of India, as it stood then, but Parliament reduced its size. It was not necessary for Parliament to say that the measure was

36. PP, Commons, E. Stanhope, 2 August 1889.

37. Ibid, Council of India Bill, 24 August 1889.

taken in accordance with the Congress desire for reforms. On the other hand, it was not inappropriate for the Congress to feel that however small the step, it sprang from its legitimate demands for constitutional change. The difficulty, however, lay in the question: should the demands of the Congress be considered constitutional? Should the Congress be accorded recognition of its role to advance political demands?

The Congress aimed at securing the introduction of representative institutions. In some way or other that subject led to serious discussions in Parliament. Even the most ardent advocates of the Congress cause knew that it was too early to talk of elective Legislative Councils in India. But, with their hands on the pulse of the Indian educated classes, they could not avoid raising the question of gradual introduction of representative elements. Years ago John Bright once compared the Government of India with that of Russia saying that both were precisely the same, only that the population of India was three times that of Russia. In view of the changing times and growing consciousness, a policy of liberalisation was thought necessary. That could be done through elections, no matter how limited to begin with.

The National Congress in its Bombay session in 1889, with William Wedderburn in the chair and Charles Bradlaugh present, prepared an outline of reforms. Among its several provisions there were the following:

1. The Imperial and Provincial Legislative Councils to consist respectively of members, not less than one-half of whom are to be elected, not more than one-fourth to sit ex-officio, and the rest to be nominated by Government.
3. All male British subjects above 21 years of age possessing certain qualifications and not subject to certain disqualifications to be voters.
6. All elections to be by ballot.<sup>38</sup>

The Congress also passed a resolution that "the House of Commons will forthwith restore the right, formerly possessed

38. INC, see Resolution II, 1889, containing the skeleton scheme for reform.



by members of that Honourable House, of stating to Parliament any matter of grievance of the natives of India before Mr. Speaker leaves the chair, for the presentation in Committee of the Indian Budget statement, and . . . that the House of Commons will, in future, take into consideration the Annual Indian Budget statement at such a date as will ensure its full and adequate discussion . . .”<sup>39</sup> The Congress authorised its President, William Wedderburn, to sign a petition in the name and on behalf of the Congress for presentation to the House of Commons in accordance with the terms of that Resolution. The purpose was to remind Parliament that it ruled India without paying adequate time or attention to her numerous problems and grievances. The people of the empire had a right to the attention of the sovereign body which ruled them from across the seven seas.

In view of the attitude of the radicals in the Commons towards the Indian reforms, the Secretary of State was arming himself with opinions of the Indian administrators against reform ideas. “With regard to the elective principle,” he wrote to the Viceroy, “I am very glad, at all events, to find that both Lord Dufferin and yourself are entirely opposed to its being applied to the Supreme Council. I think that such a step would be fatal to our rule in India. As regards the Provincial Councils, I know from private correspondence that both Lord Reay and Lord Connemara are entirely against it, and I presume that their Councils would be of the same opinion.”<sup>40</sup> The latest Congress scheme made him more anxious to mobilise opinion against the Council reforms.

Within a few weeks of his return from Bombay after attending the Congress, Bradlaugh rose in the House of Commons and acting upon the petition of William Wedderburn was asking for the restoration of the right of raising matters of grievance, with Mr. Speaker in the chair, prior to the annual Budget statement.” Roper Lethbridge, Member for North Kensington brought a resolution based on same petition seeking something should come out of that. But the First Lord of the Treasury

39. INC, Resolution IX, December 1889,

40. LP, B.P. 7/17, Cross to Lansdowne, 23 January 1890.

informed Parliament that the Government were not prepared to recommend an alteration in the rules of the House as was suggested.<sup>41</sup> It was apparent that in view of the increasing number of Congress sympathisers in the House, the Government did not think it desirable to create conditions for more elaborate ventilation of Indian grievances.

The question of the reform of the Legislative Councils, however, was taken up by Parliament without delay. Important discussions on the subject began in the spring of 1890.

The Secretary of State for India, Viscount Cross moved the Indian Councils Bill for the second reading in the House of Lords in March 1890. The debate on the Bill, particularly in the Lords, revealed deep-rooted misapprehensions about the Congress principles about reforms. The Legislative Councils functioned within too narrow limits. The Bill only wanted to extend its functions to a small extent. There were persistent demands in those directions from various quarters in India for long. Since 1885, one of the demands of the Congress was that an opportunity should be afforded for an annual discussion of the financial condition of the country and the financial proposals of the Government. Further, the Congress claimed that in the Legislative Councils the members should have the right to move motions and demand divisions. Above everything, there should be people's representatives in the Indian legislatures. As the House of Lords started discussing the Bill, the Congress demands as formulated at Bombay in 1889 dominated their thought to a large extent. Naturally enough, the Congress as a body came for scrutiny and through that its reform proposals were assessed. The Earl of Northbrook, at one time the Governor-General and Viceroy of India, very much regretted the Congress language, which, he believed, 'if read by any large number of the natives, or to any great extent, by the natives of India, might be decidedly dangerous'. He began to judge the Congress and through its character, the issues approaching 'anything like representative bodies among the natives of India'. Northbrook raised a question:

"It will be within the knowledge of those who are

41. PP, Commons, see Indian Grievances, 17 February 1890.

acquainted with the subject that this Congress has not been without its disadvantages, because it has excited very considerable differences of opinion in various parts of India, where the natives are of different religious opinions, and especially among the Mahomedan subjects of Her Majesty in India.”<sup>42</sup>

That theme was taken up. The strictly constitutional aspects of the Bill were subjected to political considerations of a deeper character. The need for ‘care and caution’ was thought more essential than the talk on concessions. Viscount Cross said:

“It is unnecessary for me to dilate in your Lordships’ House upon the size of India, upon the number of races, or, I may say, nations; upon their differences in creed and in manners and customs, from one end of India to the other. As was well said by the late Sir Henry Maine, in speaking of India, there is no more resemblance between a Punjabee and a Bengalee, between an Indian of Hindustan and an Indian of Malabar, than there is between an Englishman and a Romanian, or between a spaniard and a Swede . . . This debate has . . . shown that no man in his senses would ever think of having parliamentary constituencies there such as we have in England. They are absolutely unsuited to the Eastern habits and absolutely unsuited to a country like India.”<sup>43</sup>

The Earl of Kimberley conceded that it was entirely chimerical to entertain the notion that Britain could allow a parliamentary system in India. He thought it inconsistent not merely with the British system of government in India, but inconsistent with the condition of the population of India, the state of their civilisation, and the whole of the circumstances of the country. “The notion of a parliamentary representation,” he said, “of so vast a country—almost as large as Europe—containing so large a number of different races is one of the wildest imaginations that ever entered the minds of men.”<sup>44</sup> He however, was not inclined to disregard the efforts made by the Indian National Congress, and appealed to the

42. PP, Lords, Earl of Northbrook, 6 March 1890.

43. Ibid, Viscount Cross, 6 March 1890.

44. Ibid, Earl of Kimberley, 6 March 1890.

House to consider and give weight to the opinions they had expressed. Kimberley referred to the Minute of Lord Dufferin (which was 'stolen and published' leading to 'a scandalous divulgence of public correspondence') recommending introduction of election to the Legislative Councils. Next, he emphasised:

"You have created educated natives, and their influence will tend to increase, and they will hold opinions which though they may not find utterance still exist in the minds of a great many more people than appears on the surface. Looking at the state of the world at present I need not ask any practical man whether these demands will not increase. I think they will increase, and they will have to be taken some notice of . . . My Lords, on one that you can put upon these Legislative Councils can possibly represent the ryots of India . . . But that does not entail that there are not Bodies in India whose opinion it would be desirable to have."<sup>45</sup>

Such speeches were rare in the House of Lords. The Conservative Prime Minister, the Marquis of Salisbury, warned the Opposition to recognise how deep a responsibility might lie upon any Government, or upon any Parliament, which would introduce the elective principle as an effective agent in the Government of India. "The principle of election or Government by representation," he declared, "is not an Eastern idea; it does not fit Eastern traditions or Eastern minds."<sup>46</sup> The Prime Minister linked the issue of elective principle with the problem of 'a deeply divided population'. He explained:

"Representative Government answers admirably so long as all those who are represented desire much the same thing, and have interests tolerably analogous; but it is put to an intolerable strain when it rests upon a community divided into two sections, one of which is bitterly hostile to the other, and desirous of opposing it upon all occasions. We do not know how the Mahomedan and Hindoo populations if placed face to face with each other in elective representative Government would view each other; but we know, at all events, that one of the heaviest responsibilities and severest duties of the Govern-

45. PP, Lords, Earl of Kimberley, 6 March 1890.

46. Ibid, Marquis of Salisbury, 6 March 1890.

ment of India is to prevent the outbreak of hostilities caused by the profound differences between those two communities—difference in race, traditions, history, and creed.”<sup>47</sup>

The Prime minister appealed to the House not to draft an elective system on India. Framing of constituencies, in consideration of the vast interests to be represented, appeared too insurmountable a problem. He could not imagine that elective principles could be introduced in small doses. “At least, we know this of the elective principles from our experience in Europe,” he said, “that wherever it has made for itself a small channel it has been able to widen and widen gradually, until all has been carried before it, and that is the danger of any action you may take in India. I hope we shall not imagine that when once we have consigned ourselves to this principle we can retrace our steps or take away the powers that we have given, or that we can undo the result of any mistake we may make.”<sup>48</sup>

The consequences of parliamentary innovations were presented in such a way that the House could not venture to think of the subject without the most careful and circumspect examination of all possible dangers or difficulties. Lord Salisbury’s advice to Lords not to launch into a great innovation carried conviction with many. The question—was India a nation—was like a rock against which the tide of ideas about reforms was to dash and break. A feeble voice against the Salisbury thesis was raised in the Lords by Lord Stanley of Alderley. Looking at India from a different point of view, he pointed out :

“The noble Viscount said that there was no real people of India, but only a collection of races of various languages, religions, manners, and customs but there is no nation of Europe which is not so composed, even in the United Kingdom. And as Voltaire said of England, ‘It is a country of hundred religions and but one sauce’, and the people of India also have one sauce, which prevails from one end of the country to the other that is—curry. The Government will deceive itself if it does not recognise the great progress in India

47. PP, Lords, Marquis of Salisbury, 6 March 1890.

48. Ibid.

in regard to unity. It is becoming one through the spread of the English language, through the Penal Code, and through the railways; and Mr. Gladstone has said that he desired the amalgamation of the armies of India because it would promote unity in the same way as occurred in Italy from sending the troops from one end of the country, to the other.”<sup>49</sup>

No Bill could get the approval of the House unless sufficient time passed. The Indian Councils Bill had also to face the ordeal of delay. But discussions on the Bill in Parliament roused resentment and bitterness in Congress circles. Prime Minister Salisbury and his colleagues had raised issues which affected the very fundamentals which the Congress stood to represent. Was it a national body? Was India a nation? Could Congress represent India?

The Congress leadership sharply reacted to British policies. When the Congress met in Calcutta in 1890, the Chairman of the Reception Committee, Man Mohan Ghose, expressed his feeling thus:

“ ‘To divide and rule’ is a wicked policy as unworthy of the great English people as it is practically impossible after (what) they have themselves done for us; because you can no more, now, keep the different races of this country disunited in feelings and sentiments, for any length of time, than you can abolish your schools and colleges, your railroads and telegraphs. But then it is asked ‘whom does the National Congress represent?’ ‘What right has it to speak on behalf of the masses of the people who know nothing about the Congress?’ My answer is the National Congress represents the thinking portion of the people of India.”<sup>50</sup>

Against the Conservative view in Parliament that no constituency could be formed in India to which the privilege of electing the members could be extended, the Congress leaders referred to the defective electoral systems which persisted in England before the first Reform Bill. Indian electorates, it was said, could not be half as bad as those which existed in pre-reform days in England. Yet, even the close and rotten

49. PP, Lords, Lord Stanley of Alderley, 6 March 1890.

50. CC, Man Mohan Ghose, Calcutta 1890,

boroughs of those days rendered excellent service to British democracy by returning bright and illustrious sons of England to their Parliament. It was pointed out how Sheridan was returned by a constituency of only 70 electors, and Pitt the Younger by a constituency having only 100 electors. Indian electoral systems could develop in similar manner from defects to perfection. Madan Mohan Malaviya felt: °

“It seems to me that nothing could be sadder than to see the Premier of England occupying the high position that he does, and the Secretary of State for India putting forth such an utterly false and groundless plea, against the introduction of the principle of representation in this country. It was to be expected that having had such long parliamentary careers, and having lived the greater part of their lives in England, the home of parliamentary institutions, they would know that constituencies are created not by the people but by the Government. The elements which go to make up a constituency no doubt exist; but until the Government choose to confer the franchise on these elements, no constituency can possibly be created.”<sup>51</sup>

The anger against Salisbury was so deep that V. Krishna Swami Iyer went to the extent of saying:

“How so infinitely superior a man as Rangacharlu was only utilised by Providence as Prime Minister of a little state like Mysore, and so infinitely inferior a man as the Marquis of Salisbury is tolerated as Prime Minister of a vast empire like Great Britain, is one of those matters that fairly bewilder those who, like myself, believe in a righteous overruling power that guides and governs the affairs of mankind.”<sup>52</sup>

The Congress President Pheroza Shah Mehta had to emphasise the need for Indian unity in face of external challenge that India contained a diverse and divided people. “To my mind,” he said, “a Parsi is a better and truer Parsi, as a Mohemmedan or Hindu, the more he is attached to the land which gave him birth, the more he is bound in brotherly relations and affection to all the children of the soil, the more he

51. CC, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Calcutta, 1890.

52. CC, V. Krishna Swami Iyer, Calcutta, 1890.

recognises the fraternity of all the communities of the country and the immutable bond which binds them together in the pursuit of common aims and objects under a common Government.”<sup>53</sup>

“Then, gentlemen,” he called the attention of the Congress to the question of elective principles, “it is made clear that we have not learnt the lessons of history so badly as to demand the introduction of the full-blown representative institutions which, in England, have been the growth of centuries . . . We have shown that it is they who defy the lessons of history and experience, when they talk of waiting to make a beginning, till the masses of the people are fully equipped with all the virtues and all the qualifications which adorn the citizens of Utopia, in fact, till a millennium has set in, when we should hardly require such institutions at all.”<sup>54</sup>

The Congress claimed that the Indian Council's Bill of Lord Cross was introduced in the House of Lords because of pressure from India. “It was at once the official recognition of the *raison d'être* of the Congress, and the first fruits of its labours.”<sup>55</sup> But, it criticised both the character and the contents of the Bill. It was described a most halting and unsatisfactory measure, in framing which the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State laboured under the conception that the Indian people would be always asking for more, to whom, therefore, it would be a piece of prudent policy to begin with offering as little as possible. The Bill was further criticised as a superb steam-engine from which the necessary material to generate steam was carefully excluded, substituting in its place coloured shams to look like it. The rights of interpellation and of the discussion of the Budget were granted, but the living force of the elective principle, which alone could properly work them, was not introduced in the organisation of the enlarged Councils. While resenting the disdainful attitude of the Prime Minister towards representative institutions in India the Congress decided not to despair but to go on pressing for constitutional demands.

53. CC, Pherozeshah Mehta, Calcutta, 1890.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.



Shortly before the Congress had assembled in Calcutta the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal issued a circular forbidding Government officials from attending it.\* Allan Octavian Hume took up the issue and asked the Viceroy if such an order was necessary. Lansdowne, who wanted to keep Hume at an arm's length, could not however deny him an interview. And, when they met, Hume complained that 'the Government of India was endeavouring to boycott the Congress' and that some of its officials were notoriously in the habit of showing displeasure to persons connected with it. The Viceroy knew that the charges were true. He explained to Hume that the orders were not specially directed against the Congress, but that it was indispensable that Government officials should observe an attitude of strict neutrality, and avoid associating themselves with any political movements."<sup>56</sup>

The Viceroy suspected that the Congress leaders wanted to use the Bengal Circular to show to Parliament how intolerant the Government of India was of the Congress. As for himself, he did not want to displease the Congress, because, as the head of the Indian administration, he was pleased at the constitutional behaviour of the Congress leadership. To him, the safest course as that time was to set aside the Congress demands, but not the Congress. He told the Secretary of State: "I am, however, strongly of opinion that it is for our interests not to show any animus against the Congress, but so long as it acts within constitutional limits, to accept it good-humouredly as representing the views of the advanced party in Indian politics. . . . With a free Press and the right of public meeting, we shall always have some organisation of this kind to deal with. I doubt whether it could, upon the whole, assume a more innocuous shape than that which is now takes. So long as it is allowed to hold its meetings under the nose of the Government of India, and so long as these meetings are frequented by Members of the Viceroy's Legislative Council, Judges of the High Court, and other functionaries of position, it is useless either to ignore its existence, or to endeavour to procure its

\* The circular was issued by the Bengal Government on 26 December 1890.

56, LP, B.P. 7/17, Lansdowne to Cross, 28 January 1891.

suppression by indirect methods. Nothing will so well serve to keep the movement alive as exhibitions of hostility or timidity on the part of the Government of India.”<sup>57</sup>

The Congress, in the meantime, was striking a posture of not reposing any faith in the Conservative Party. Many depended, therefore, on the capacity of the Indian sympathisers to exert pressure on Parliament in securing reforms. Charles Bradlaugh had prepared a draft Bill entitled ‘An Act to amend the Indian Councils Act of 1861’ for consideration of Parliament. The Congress of 1890 had approved of it.<sup>58</sup> While thanking Bradlaugh, Wedderburn, W.S. Caine, J. Bright Maclaren, M.P., J. Ellis, M.P. and George Yule, for their active interest in its demands, the Congress proceeded to organise some political campaign in England to draw public attention to those issues. It was decided to appoint George Yule, Pherozechah Mehta, W.C. Bonnerjee, J. Adam, Man Mohan Ghose, A.O. Hume, Kali Charan Banerjee, Dadabhai Naoroji, D.A. Khare, and such other gentlemen as may volunteer for the duty, to represent the Congress views in England, and press for the consideration of the British public the political reforms which the Congress advocated.<sup>59</sup>

At a time when the Congress felt bold to extend its political activity to England itself, it lost its greatest friend and champion in that country, Charles Bradlaugh. Bradlaugh died on 30 January 1891\*. Had he lived a few years more, the concern of Parliament for the Indian National Congress would have led to more valid constitutional measures. It was his courage, coupled with passion, which presented the Indian suffering in vivid colours to the representatives of the ruling race at the very centre of imperial authority. Once, while criticising Bradlaugh for his ‘oratorical rampgae’, Richard Temple said: “I am aware that the hon. Member is nothing if he is not querulous; his voice seemed to quiver with emotion when he mentioned even so light a subject as the filagree silver work from India. He seems to have a mission to complain of

57. LP, B.P. 7/17, Lansdowne to Cross, 28 January 1891.

58. INC, Resolution I, 1890.

59. INC, Resolution XV, 1890.

\* He was born on 26 September 1833.

India all round.”<sup>60</sup> It was pointed out in Parliament soon after his death by one of his friends. Swift MacNeill, that always there was the attempt from Government side not to allow Bradlaugh to raise issues of vital character concerning India. In one of his speeches in the closing days of his life when the ruling was given from the chair that the points he raised were outside the scope of discussion, Bradlaugh said: “The moment you say that, it is my duty to accept, as I always do with profound respect, the ruling you give, but it then becomes my duty to appeal to this Committee, when it is sitting as a House, to give at least once a year as, by the old custom, always was given, some opportunity during which the representatives of a defenceless nation may put before Parliament their criticism of the official statement made and some reasons for the grievances pointed out.”<sup>61</sup> Bradlaugh deeply resented the Government efforts to restrict Indian discussions to the minimum possible time and to rule important issues out of order. His example no doubt inspired several others to keep the Indian interest alive, but his loss was irreparable as far as the cause of the Congress was concerned. When the Congress met in its seventh session at Nagpur in 1891, its feeling about the departed leader was expressed by Pheroza Shah Mehta in the following words:

“India had never more reason to lament what the poet has described, with all the force of the old Hellenic conviction, as ‘the mystery of the cruelty of things’. than what it was suddenly and despite the prayers of millions, deprived of the valient Knight who had sworn to do battle for her; her chosen and trusted champion, her true and tender friend, her wise and sober counsellor, her accredited representative in the great and august council of the Empire.”<sup>62</sup>

60. PP, Commons, Richard Temple, 27 August 1889.

61. Ibid, see Debate on East India Financial Statement, Swift MacNeill, 17 February 1891.

62. CC, see *Feature*, the Seventh Congress, Nagpur 1891.

The British Committee of the Indian National Congress at London engraved the following words in Memorium.

Charles Bradlaugh,  
The Friend and Champion of India.

The measures which the late Charles Bradlaugh had proposed to adopt in order to persuade Parliament to act in favour of representative systems in India fizzled out. But Parliament resumed debate on the Bill for the reorganisation of the Legislative Councils in India. Several Members felt that, if adequately handled, it was going to mark the most important stage of development in the Government of India since the beginning of the direct rule of the Crown. It was equally known that widespread dissatisfaction prevailed in India at the delay in finalising the matter. Much time was being taken up by introduction and re-introduction of the Bill without any real advance towards the objectives. So, early in 1892 when the Queen indicated in her speech from the throne that something was going to be done, the pro-Congress elements in the Commons once again started the campaign for representative institutions. "As one in close contact with the educated opinion of India," said Samuel Smith, the Member for Flintshire, on 9 February 1892, "and fairly acquainted with the progress of events there, I am bound to say that unless the elective principle in some way, some substantial way, introduced into this Bill, it will altogether fail to satisfy the people, or fulfil those purposes of better Government which we all hope to bring about. What India needs is some authentic means of expressing its wishes to its rulers, and to get an authentic means it is absolutely necessary that we should concede in some form the principle of representation."<sup>63</sup> He pointed out that there were in India nearly as many university graduates as in England. The National Congress, which met like 'great representative assemblies' conducted proceedings marked for 'wisdom, moderation, and loyalty'. "Now Sir," he argued,

—*contd.*

Born

26th September, 1833

Died

30 January, 1891

"He was one who never turned his back, but strode  
breast forwards,

Never doubted clouds would break,

Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong could triumph;

Held: we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better."

63. PP, Commons, Debate on the Queen's Speech, Samuel Smith, 9 February 1892.

"this Indian National Congress is a very great political factor, a factor of the first magnitude, it cannot be ignored. It has raised in the most moderate and constitutional manner serious demands, and the principal of these—it may be said to lie at the basis of all the others—is one for elective representation on the great Councils of India . . . Unless we do so we are preparing for ourselves a time of trouble in India, when seditious agitation may take the place of constitutional action. It would be immensely better to meet the natives of India half way."<sup>64</sup>

The Bill that was produced in the previous session was meant, as if, only to be withdrawn. But discussions on the subject had shown how reluctant Parliament was to concede anything. Some Liberal Party Members wanted to know if the proposed new Bill actually aimed at meeting the wishes of the Liberals to secure the welfare of the Indian people. They themselves did not believe in granting substantive concessions in the direction of elective institutions, but always stood for some symbolic gesture to please the people. One of them, therefore, emphasised: "The members of the Indian National Congress do not wish to dogmatise by proposing the exact method in which representation should be provided for, and leave that to the Viceroy and the Viceregal Council; but if the Bill is to be at all commensurate to the aspirations of the Indian people it must contain the representative principle."<sup>65</sup> After the death of the Bradlaugh, the demands for reforms were voiced mostly by the Irish Members who decided in principle to ventilate the cause of India before the English people. On 12 February 1892, one of them, J.G. Swift MacNeill, told the House: A deputation is coming over from India, and their voice, I can assure hon. Members opposite, will be heard at the approaching General Election,"<sup>66</sup> George Nathaniel Curzon, the Under Secretary of State for India, promptly assured the Common:

"Thirty years ago, when the Crown took over the Government, there was not a single native member of the Legislative Councils. There are now four in the Governor-General's

64. PP, Commons, Debate on the Queen's Speech, Samuel Smith, 9 February 1892.

65. PP, Commons, C.E. Schwann, 9 February 1892.

66. PP, Commons, J.G. Swift MacNeill, 12 February 1892,

Council (Legislative), five in Madras, five in Bombay, four in Bengal, and two in the North-West provinces, 20 in all. In addition to these it will be my privilege before long to introduce a Bill dealing with the reorganisation and extension of the Councils by which the number of native members on them will be very considerably increased.”<sup>67</sup>

In the House of Lords, on 15 February 1892, the Secretary of State for India, Viscount Cross, reintroduced the Indian Councils Act (1861) Amendment Bill for a second reading. It was drawn up precisely in the same terms as the one that was before the Lords in 1890. The Government said that the pressure of business in the Lower House prevented the Bill from being passed either in 1890 or 1891. “The main objects of the Bill,” declared Viscount Cross, “are to enable the Legislative Councils of India, in the first place, to interrogate the Government, to make interpellations upon certain questions ; also to enable them to discuss questions of finance ; also to enlarge the number of Legislative Councils . . . ; to enable the Viceroy, with the consent of the Secretary of State, to make certain rules as to the nomination of people, no doubt with a considerable amount of latitude in their choice of Councillors.”<sup>68</sup> From the Opposition side, the Earl of Kimberley suggested that the possibility of election being one of the modes of choosing those persons to be nominated by the Council should be more explicitly recognised in the Bill. “I think,” he said, “if the Governor-General of India should find that he is able to introduce in some modified form, some system of election it will be seen how it works; and, if it works well, the Governor-General will be able, with the approval of the Secretary of State, to give a further extension to the principle.”<sup>69</sup> While suggesting this, he also revealed the extreme cautiousness of the Liberals by saying that he did not criticise the Bill in any hostile spirit. All that he wanted was that some kind of reform should be granted without elaborate discussion and unnecessary delay. “I think,” he said, “it is almost dangerous to leave a subject of this kind hung to be

67. PP, Commons, G.N. Curzon, 12 February 1892.

68. PP, Lords, Viscount Cross, 15 February 1892.

69. PP, Lords, Earl of Kimberley, 15 February 1892.

perpetually discussed by all manner of persons, and that having once allowed that, at all events, some amendment is necessary with regard to the mode of constituting these Legislative Councils, it is incumbent upon the Government and Parliament to pass the Bill that they may think expedient as speedily as possible into law.”<sup>70</sup>

The cautious attitude of the Liberals in general and of the Liberal Lords in Particular was brought out by their reluctance to use the word ‘election’ in the context of Indian legislative institutions. They agreed to make the law elastic enough to enable the Secretary of State and the Viceroy to seek popular views, in some way or other, on the selections for Legislative Councils. But, never should that elasticity include elective processes. When the Earl of Kimberley referred to ‘some system of election,’ the Earl of Northbrook said :

“I should have preferred that my noble Friend should have used the term ‘representation’ rather than ‘election’, although I do not believe there is any real difference between the two; for this reason: that I conceive, so far as I know, that India is a country quite unfit for any system of popular election by the formation of popular constituencies and the election of members by large constitnencies ; whereas I believe there are municipal and other bodies in India who can be perfectly well trusted to recommend to the Viceroy representatives of those bodies, and that very possibly some such system of representation as that might be found quite in accordance with the present condition of India, and would satisfy a feeling—I believe a legitimate feeling—which has been very moderately and properly expressed by public bodies in India of late on that matter.”<sup>71</sup>

The Conservative Prime Minister, Marquis of Salisbury, agreed with Lord Northbrook that the word ‘representation’ expressed the intention of the Government better. And, in his typical way, perhaps not forgetting what the Congress had spoken of him in India, he declared:

“I think that we all desire to popularise these bodies, so as

70. PP, Lords, Earl of Kimberley, 15 February 1892.

71. PP, Lords, Earl of Northbrook, 15 February 1892.

practically to bring them into harmony with the dominant sentiment of the Indian people; but we must be careful lest, by the application of accidental machinery, we bring into power not the strong, natural, vigorous, effective elements of Indian Society, but the more artificial and weakly elements which we ourselves have made and have brought into prominence.”<sup>72</sup>

In the Lower House, it was Curzon who presented the Bill. His anger against the Congress at that time was not that intense as it became in subsequent years. To rush the Bill through the Commons, he read out a passage from a letter written by the British Committee of the Indian National Congress to the Secretary of State to show how the Congress expressed deep regret at the withdrawal of the Councils Bill on the previous occasion, and how the Congress had notified that “bitter disappointment will be caused throughout India by the abandonment for yet another year of any action in a matter of such paramount importance to our Indian fellow citizens.”<sup>73</sup>

Curzon explained the official attitude in favour of giving opportunities to non-official elements in Indian society to take part in the functioning of Government, and in that way to lend official recognition to the development of political interest and political activity which were visible among the higher classes of Indian society. But coming to the question of granting rights of election to the people of India, he proclaimed his theory thus:

“Who are the people of India? The people of India are the voiceless million who can neither read nor write their own tongues, who have no knowledge whatever of English, who are not perhaps universally aware of the fact that the English are in their country as rulers. The people of India are the ryots and the peasants, whose life is not one of political aspiration, but of mute penury and toil. The plans and policy of the Congress Party in India would leave this vast amorphous residuum absolutely untouched. I do not desire to speak in any other than terms of respect of the Congress Party of India.

72. PP, Lords, Marquis of Salisbury, 15 February 1892.

73. PP, Commons, see Curzon's statement, 28 March 1892.

The letter in question was written in July 1891.



That Party contains a number of intelligent, liberal-minded, and public-spirited men, who undoubtedly represent that portion of the Indian people which has profited by the educational advantages placed at their doors, and which is more or less imbued with European ideas; but as to their relationship to the people of India, the constituency which the Congress Party represents cannot be described as otherwise than a minute and almost microscopic minority of the total population of India. At the present time the population of British India is 221,000,000; and of that number it has been calculated that not more than from 3 to 4 per cent can read or write any one of their native tongues; considerably less than one per cent—about one-fourth or one-third—can read or write English . . . It appears to me that you can as little judge of the feelings and aspirations of the people of India from the plans and proposals of the Congress Party as you can judge of the physical configuration of a country which is wrapped up in the mists of early morning, but a few of whose top most peaks have been touched by the rising sun. To propose an elaborate system of representation for a people in this stage of development would appear to me to be, in the highest degree, premature and unwise. To describe such a system as representation of the people of India would be little better than a farce.”<sup>74</sup>

Curzon tried to support this thesis with examples from the British history regarding slow evolution of democracy through centuries of conflict and storm. And, if Britain had at last entered into anything like its full fruition, it was because of the political equality and political freedom which prevailed in that country. Indians had no instinctive sense of what political equality was because they constituted a community sundered into irreconcilable camps. Differences of caste, of religion, and of custom held men fast-bound during their lifetime, and Curzon felt, the rigours of those differences were not abated even beyond the grave! The truth, therefore, according to him, was that the Indian Congress was not of one mind, and did not speak with one voice even on elective principle.

As Curzon moved that the Bill be read a second time, one

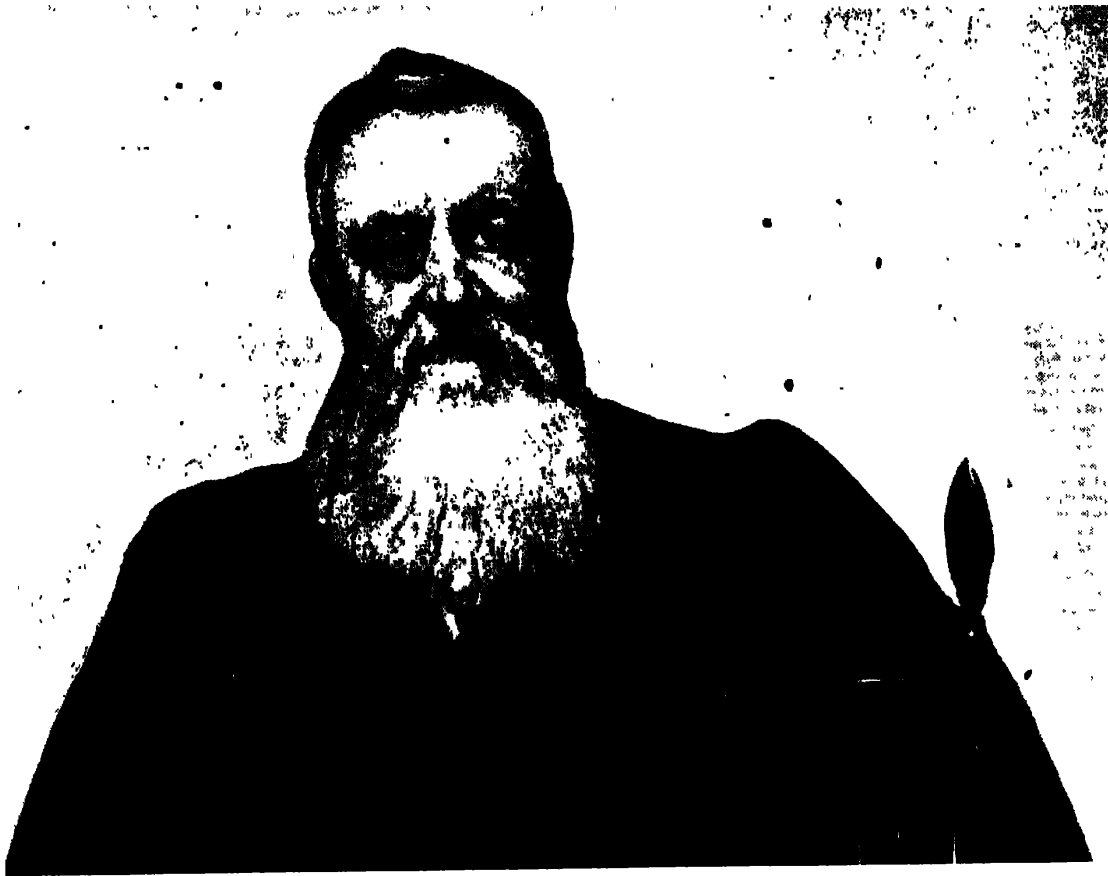
74. PP, Commons, Curzon, 28 March 1892.



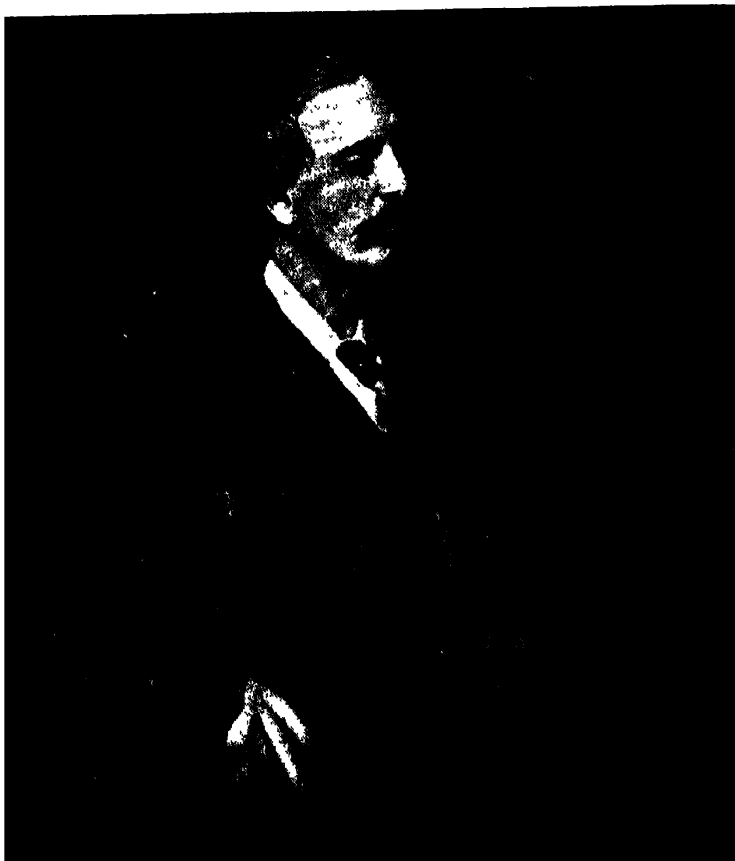
Presence at the first Session of Indian National Congress  
held in Bombay 1885



A.O. Hume



Lord Ripon



Lord Dufferin



Dadabhai Naoroji



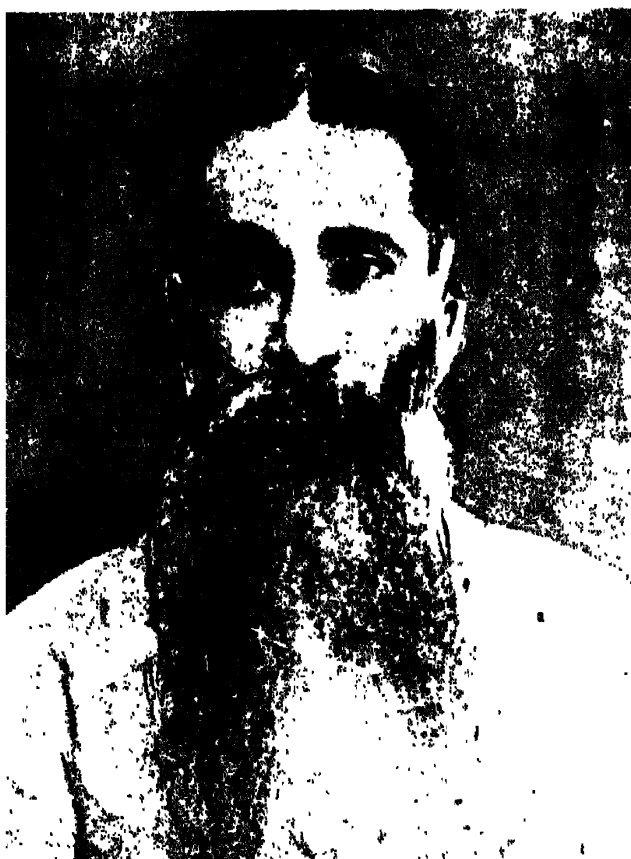
Charles Bradlaugh



Hume

Dadabhai

Wedderburn



W.C. Bonnerjee



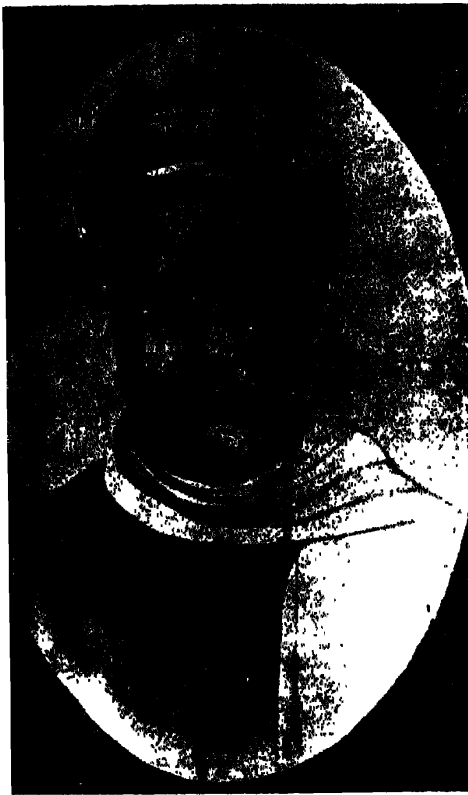
Pheroza Shah Mehta



W. Wedderburn



Henry Cotton



Gopal Krishna Gokhale



Bal Gangadhar Tilak

The last photographs taken  
of Lord Curzon on his  
way to attend a Cabinet meeting





Annie Besant

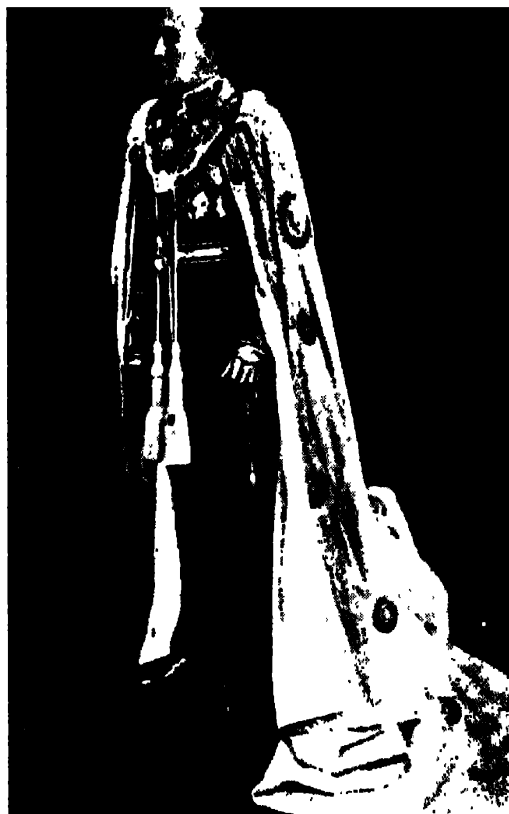


Madan Mohan Malaviya





John Morley



Lord Minto



of the Congress sympathisers in Parliament, the Member for Manchester North, C.E. Schwann moved an amendment that "in the opinion of this House, no reform of the Indian Councils which does not embody the elective principle will prove satisfactory to the Indian people, or compatible with the good Government of India."<sup>75</sup> In this original draft of the amendment he wrote of 'the elective principle as defined at the meetings of the Indian National Congress'.

The old issue once again surfaced—was India a nation? The instrumentality of the English language, of commerce, of education, of a free Press, and of the right of free assembly was shown to have developed the idea of nationality. And what about the Congress? Did it voice the aspirations of the nation? "You will find amongst the members of the National Congress," argued Schwann, "Hindoos, Mussulmans, Parsees, Christians, Jains, Sikhs etc., etc., and other races. Some of them travel thousands of miles journeying very often three or four days and nights, in order to be present at this National Congress."<sup>76</sup> C.E. Schwann was present at the meeting of the National Congress in 1890, and he drew a vivid picture of that body before the Commons. "Everything was conducted exactly with as much regularity as if it had been a meeting of the great Federations of Conservative or Liberal Associations in this country . . . I should also like to point out that the delegates were all elected in open, free, public meeting; and that, therefore, while we are looking around to see if by any possibility we can introduce a little of the elective principle into India, the elective principle has been already carried on in India to a very large extent, in the most orderly and regular manner, by a large section of the Indian people. Do not let us suppose, therefore, that the principle of election is a new one in India."<sup>77</sup>

Arguments were advanced in favour of elective principles by referring to the success of local bodies which functioned in India at that time. There were 755 municipalities and about 892 local boards. A certain proportion of the members of

75. PP, Commons, C.E. Schwann, 28 March 1892.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.

those bodies were nominated, but a large number, the majority, of them were elected. Officials testified to the great interest shown by the people in those elections. In some contested elections, about 90 per cent or more of the registered electors appeared at the polling places and voted.

Attention of the House was drawn to hopes and expectations which were roused in the minds of educated Indians by some famous Englishmen of the time.\* They hoped to strengthen the British rule in India by widening its base and this was not without meaning. Everybody knew how popular was the constitution of the existing Legislative Councils. Not only did the officials predominate, but their group consisted of persons, who were unable to exercise any personal freedom. They were described as puppets. It was said that an Indian Deputy Magistrate could not have offered advice unacceptable to a Lieutenant-Governor to whom he owed his appointment, and on whom depended his future. From every point of view, the demands of Indian people were taken as reasonable. The friends of the Congress in Parliament pressed for early reform.

To agree or not to agree for elective principles for India became a thorny problem for the House of Commons. At that critical stage much depended on what W.E. Gladstone, the venerable Liberal figure in the Commons, thought of the subject. He knew that the language of the Bill, as was brought by the Conservatives, could not be said to have embodied the elective principle. Yet, thought Gladstone, if it was not meant to pave the way for that principle, it was in its language very

\* For example: A short while ago Lord Ripon lectured to some Indian students at Edinburgh in following words:

"I do not at all desire to see the early establishment of household suffrage throughout India, and I am sure you will not be surprised when I say so; but what I do wish to see is that there should be infused into the Legislative Councils of that country a reasonable proportion of the representative element, which will enable you, the educated natives of that country, to make your voices really heard by the Government through the representatives of your own choosing."

See contents in C.E. Schwann's speech in Commons on 28 March 1892.

peculiar indeed. Naturally enough, Gladstone was himself not interested at the age of 84 to develop a personal interest in the future of India. His arguments showed that at times he contradicted himself. He wanted to be sure that India possessed material for elective elements. And, he felt satisfied that they were there. "Undoubtedly, Sir," he addressed the Speaker, "as far as my prepossessions go, I should look presumptively with the greatest amount of expectation and hope to the Municipal Bodies and the Local Authorities in India, in which the elective element is already included."<sup>78</sup> Considering the need for further progress on those lines when the House was busy considering reforms, the Liberal leader expressed the following sentiment:

"In an Asiatic country like India, with its ancient civilisation, with its institutions so peculiar, with such diversities of races, religions, and pursuits, with such an enormous extent of country, and such a multitude of human beings, as probably, except in the case of China, never were before comprehended under a single Government, I can well understand the difficulties that confront us in seeking to carry out our task. But, great as the difficulties are, the task is a noble task, and one that will require the utmost prudence and wisdom to carry it to a successful consummation. But we may feel, after the practical assurances we have had from persons of the highest capacity and the greatest responsibility, we may feel justified in expecting something more than a merely nominal beginning in this great and magnificent undertaking."<sup>79</sup>

The lofty idealism of Gladstone was at once compromised by some practical consideration of strictly political character involving British parties. He was caught between the horns of a dilemma. On one side there was the Conservative Bill. On the other side there was the Amendment from the radical few who supported the Congress ideologies. Should the greatest Liberal leader of the time persuade his followers to support the Indian group? If not, should he be an instrument to prove the suspicion that the Liberal Party was as conservative as the

78. PP, Commons, W.E. Gladstone, 28 March 1892.

79. Ibid.

Conservatives in respect of India? To get out of this delicate situation, Gladstone adopted the usual method of applying the traditional principle of British unanimity. He appealed to the House:

"I think it would be a great misfortune if the House were to divide on this subject. There is no difference of principle disclosed, because the acceptance of the elective principle by the Under Secretary, though guarded, and necessarily guarded, was, on the whole, not otherwise than a frank acceptance. I do not think there is on the other side of the House any of the jealousy of the introduction of that principle, which, if it existed, would undoubtedly form a strong mark of difference between the two parties. In reality and in substance we have the same object in view, and we are prepared to recommend the employment of the same means to secure that end. If that be so, it would certainly be unfortunate that any Division should take place which though the numbers might be unequal (I certainly could not take part in any Division hostile or apparently hostile to the Bill) would, after the speech of the Under Secretary, convey a false impression. It is well the people of India should understand the truth—that united views subsequently prevail in this House on this matter."<sup>80</sup>

Gladstone's declaration that he wanted to support Curzon's Bill, on the assumption that the Bill implied a principle even though the language did not express it, gave the Conservative side a moral boost. Some Conservatives started blaming such Liberals as Ripon for having kindled hopes in India while governing that country. "Lord Ripon broke up the *entente cordiale* between Europeans and natives, and created the anti-English agitation which now finds expression in the Congress movement," said J. Maclean.<sup>81</sup> Further he charged: "The effect of Lord Ripon's Administration was to put into the heads of the natives the idea that they could govern the country themselves, and exclude the English from any exclusive rule of that country."<sup>82</sup> The Congress was not only criticised virulently, but was said to be on the decline.

80. PP, Commons, W.E. Gladstone, 28 March 1892.

81. PP, Commons, J. Maclean, 28 March 1892.

82. Ibid.

The European sympathisers of the Congress were denounced. And, against the educated sections of Indian people more charges were brought. One such charge came from the Conservative Member for Oldham, J. Maclean. He said:

“The hon. Member for Manchester (Mr. Schwann) tells us a great deal about the education we have given to the people of India. But merely intellectual education, which does not touch the morals, manners, or habits of a people, cannot change their character or give them that sobriety and robustness of disposition which is essential to the smooth and even working of representative institutions. I suppose the Barons who could not sign their names to Magna Carta might be as trusty statesmen as Burke or Macaulay; and amongst the most illiterate English peasants, who belong to a race that has the love of freedom instinctively in its life-blood, and who understood the principle of self-Government and respected the rights of individuals almost before the dawn of history, there are those who would be far more capable of attending to the administration of public affairs than the most cultivated Bengalees who ever discoursed as fluently as the Member for Midlothian (Gladstone) himself upon political institutions.”<sup>83</sup>

Gladstone, who had assured the Conservatives of his support, was assailed nevertheless for his indirect approval of elective principles. The charge against him was that when Parliament was making a change in the constitutional system of India, it should know exactly what it was doing and should not allow the principle of election to be brought in by a side wind. If Parliament were to pass a measure of that sort, it was likely to be applied in party considerations in regard to India. “Let us suppose, for example, that a Liberal Government came into office, and we had Lord Ripon as Secretary of State for India, and Lord Reay as Governor-General, would not these two noblemen strain every clause of this Bill for the purpose of introducing an elective system which would suit the views of their friends, the Members of the National Congress? It is extremely dangerous to leave such a power to whoever may be Secretary of State or Governor-General for the time being. . .”<sup>84</sup>

83. PP, Commons, J. Maclean, 28 March 1892.

84. Ibid.

It was considered necessary that if at all the principle of election was to be introduced, it should have the direct sanction of both Houses of Parliament. Otherwise, there was every possibility of a dangerous application of the new system.

To the Congress sympathisers the Conservative attack on Gladstone appeared unreasonable. The latter had accepted the implicit desire of the Conservative Government for providing some indirect, though remote, scope for introduction of representative principles. Gladstone brought this feeling to the knowledge of the House. To the hard core Conservatives it was like Gladstone taking a tactical advantage. In view of that kind of mentality and suspicion the pro-Congress group wanted to know: "Whether the Government accepted the principle of representation or not" in definite terms. They pointed out that even if the principle of election was carried out to the fullest extent, yet the Indian Council was to remain nothing more than consultative. The Conservative fear that the Indian Congress wished to capture the Executive Government was described as a perfect myth. The Conservative criticism of the National Congress was bitterly resented by the pro-Congress Members. The latter also made it clear that whatever the Government proposed to initiate through the Bill were, in fact, the Congress ideas. "The four principles," said one of them, "now embodied in the Bill are mainly due to the Indian National Congress, and yet those who at that Congress suggested these very reforms were for years subjected to wicked misrepresentation."<sup>85</sup>

Pro-Congress elements did not also hesitate to remind the Liberals that they were going back upon their own known support for reforms. Gladstone himself was reminded of what he had spoken earlier—"it will not do for us to treat with contempt or even with indifference the rising aspirations of this great people"—and was requested to live up to his own professed principles. As for the Conservative theory of granting India 'selective principle', and not elective, an illustration of how it could work was given.

"A Maharaja of the North West Provinces was appointed a

85. PP, Commons, MacNeill, 28 March 1892.

Member of the Supreme Council, and he could not speak a word of English, and was not allowed to have an interpreter. After the meeting a relative asked him how he got on. The reply was—‘At first I found it very difficult, but then there was the Governor General who elected me, and when he raised his hand I raised mine, and when he put his hand down I put down mine’.”<sup>86</sup>

Against such an absurd system the National Congress had raised its voice so that the Indian Government should benefit from a fair and independent expression of opinion coming from men representing the feelings of hundreds of thousands of their fellow-subjects. Even if the millions in India were uneducated and ignorant, yet elective system was not to suffer on that account, because as Edmund Burke believed, no statesman was worthy of the name of statesman who did not take into account the ignorance and prejudices of the people. This was the line of argument of the friends of the Congress.

In the heat of the debate the Conservative hatred for the National Congress came out in clear terms. A glaring example of it came from Richard Temple:

“I do not wish to disparage those who compose the National Congress. They are what we have made them, and no man living has had a greater share than I have had in making them what they are. All I say is that they do not represent the population of India. The hon. Member for Manchester speaks of them as forming a nationality. I cannot imagine any name less applicable to them than that of nationality. That is just what they are not. He said they spoke with the voice of the people of India. Nothing could be more contrary to the fact—their voice is their own and nothing more. The hon. Member said they have great influence over the mass of their fellow countrymen. They have no influence at all among the mass of the people. They are looked upon as semi-foreigners, having all the faults of foreigners, with, perhaps, few of their merits. They are not popular . . . Until they show greater moderation, greater sobriety of thought, greater robustness of intelligence, greater self-control—all which qualities



build up the national character—I, for one, would not entrust them with political power. Therefore, I am not in favour of making any concession to the Congress particularly.”<sup>87</sup>

Richard Temple explained in detail how India and election were contradictory terms. The masses, according to him, were strangers to the very concept of the elective principle. The working men, artisans and labourers in the field constituted the masses. Above the masses were the select classes. One of the most important of such classes was the class of village headmen. They were outside electoral ideas. Above them were the great landholders who never dreamt of election. There were tens of thousands of small land owners who were of the same mind. Next to them were the numerous peasant proprietors. They were everywhere, from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas, constituting the very backbone of the Indian population. They were wholly ignorant of the ideas of election. The frontier chiefs, who were like the wardens of the marches all around the frontiers of India, had never heard of election. Similarly, the hill tribes, who lived scattered all over the country, were thoroughly innocent of that idea. The martial races of India that supplied soldiers for the infantry and cavalry forces of the empire had never heard of election. There, too, were the purely peaceful races. The countless native bankers and traders with their accounts in every village, and also transactions extending over far away territories, the shopkeepers of the towns and villages, and the proprietors of ships and boats, were all unaware of election. There were also the numberless priests, both Hindu and Muhammedan, who lived in the recesses of temples and mosques, in cloisters and shrines, exercising influence over the lives of the people from cradle to grave. They never thought of political elections. There were too, men, belonging to the old school and looking back to the ancient regime, who regarded western civilisation as an evil. They abhorred the idea of election.

With such an anatomical dissection of the Indian society, a question could be confidently posed as to what remained of the Indian population to support elective principles except a few

87, PP, Commons, Richard Temple, 28 March 1892,

thousands who formed the National Congress! In view of the variety and importance of the different classes, who composed a powerful phalanx, and the masses who formed the population, the Congress indeed appeared as nothing. And above all, there were the Muhammedans!

The Conservative arguments against elective principle became so powerful that the Congress sympathisers had to fight a defensive battle with their back to the wall. The Conservative strength was the product of the fear of the Indian bureaucracy which stood resolutely against the very idea of elective principle. Men like Richard Temple were described as the chief apostles of the official classes. The supporters of Indian cause advanced their last argument. To find out if the Indian people were fit for election or not, it was imperative for Parliament to please them by giving some political concession, and to Indians nothing at that moment could appear more appropriate than the possibility of introduction of elective system. "I have no desire to speak as an alarmist," said Seymour Keay, "but I say that it is useless for any well-informed and impartial observer to deny that, under our frightfully expensive and impoverishing system of Government, biting adversity is now fast turning the hearts of the masses of the people against their British masters. As the struggle for bare life becomes harder and harder, a deep and sullen sense of wrong is stealing over the length and breadth of the land."<sup>88</sup> The Congress voiced those feelings, irrespective of whether it belonged to the masses or to themselves. S. Smith, the Member for Flintshire explained:

"My honest conviction is—and I have taken considerable pains to ascertain the truth—that many of the Indian people are suffering from extreme poverty and from an accumulation of grievances which prove the necessity of establishing in India some kind of local representative Government . . . And I hold that, at the present moment, there is no way of getting at native opinion more reliably than through the Indian National Congress. I am aware it does not perfectly represent the people. Everyone who knows India is aware that it is

88. PP, Commons, Seymour Keay, 28 March 1892.

almost impossible to get any Representative Body which will be a mirror of the endless shades of caste, race, and religion in India, but the Indian National Congress approaches this more nearly than any institution which has existed in India for 100 years . . . The fact is, we ought to be proud of that Congress; it is our own creation, it reproduces the education we have given to India, and our own sense of liberty and justice. It is indeed an exact copy of ourselves in Indian form.”<sup>89</sup>

Parliament was assured by the Indian sympathisers that no population was more thoroughly conservative than the population of India. Both Hindus and Muhammedans were far from being anarchical or revolutionary. It was to that kind of people that some degree of power and responsibility could be given with confidence. Along with such sober advice, the pro-Congress members were wont to spoil their case by such comments as “if we give representation to India we will be astonished to find how many defects exist in our administration. We will make discoveries which will not be pleasing to our *amour propre*, we will discover for the first time that India is full of real grievances, and of some real wrongs as well, and we ought to let them have a legitimate outlet instead of sitting on the safety valve and risking an explosion.”<sup>90</sup> It is precisely the possibility of discovering those defects through the representatives of the people that the Conservatives and most of the Liberals were opposed to. If the bureaucrats were proud, self-conscious and dignified individuals, so too were the great individuals who constituted the Congress. Describing his conversation with a man in Bombay whom he considered a true representative of the working classes, O.V. Morgan said: “In reply to my questions he said he hated the National Congress, as it was a Brahmin movement. I said it was rather a Bengalee Baboo movement. He replied that the Bengalee Baboos were the enemies of the working classes as much as the Brahmins.”<sup>91</sup>

Curzon did not want to indulge in ‘interesting and

89. PP, Commons, S. Smith, 28 March 1892.

90. Ibid.

91. PP, Commons, O.V. Morgan, 28 March 1892,

picturesque observation about the National Congress'. He flattered Gladstone for his knowledge of the enormous responsibility of the Indian Government, and expressed his agreement with the great Liberal that the degree and the manner in which the elective principle might be carried out were matters not for the consideration of Parliament, but for the consideration of the Government of India.<sup>92</sup> Curzon had gone rather too far in his interpretation of what Gladstone had meant. The latter was not present in the House to challenge the statement. But one of Gladstone's disciples challenged Curzon and pointed out:

"I quite believe the right hon. Gentleman (Gladstone) meant, when he spoke, that it was for this House, for the imperial Government of this country to lay down the general principles of equity, under which the Government of the Indian dependency was to be carried on; and at the same time he admitted—and we all follow him in that—that so far as matters of details are concerned the Governor-General and all the Governors of particular towns must be held responsible for the mode in which these general principles are to be applied."<sup>93</sup>

But the young Curzon, as the Under Secretary of State for India, had his way and his day. "The initiative is left to the Viceroy of India, and it would be an unfortunate thing for the Government or for the House to transfer that initiative to itself."<sup>94</sup> Curzon was sure that no Indian Government would initiate elections in India without the permission of the Cabinet, and no Cabinet would do it without a discussion in Parliament. Hence, giving something to the Viceroy which he could not possess, meant giving nothing. Schwann withdrew his amendment.

A jubilant Secretary of State at once informed the Viceroy how nicely the Conservative policy was carried through. "Gladstone's speech was very good. Although, naturally enough, he rather strained Curzon's words as to nomination and the making of rules, he effectually sat upon the Congress folk and strongly deprecated the too great interference of

92. PP, Commons, Curzon, 28 March 1892.

93. PP, Commons, Picton, Member for Leicester, 28 March 1892,

94. PP, Commons, Curzon, 28 March 1892.

Parliament here, and he pointed out the dangers of having persons who represent cliques, classes, or interests and who may claim the honour of representing the people (he should have said peoples) of India, adding that what we want is to get at the real heart and mind, the most upright sentiments and the most enlightened thoughts of the people of India. George Curzon made an excellent speech. What Gladstone said prevented a division."<sup>95</sup> Before the Bill could go through its next stage, the British Press gave a peculiar colour to the Indian demands. A number of writers did not care to read and understand the contents of parliamentary debates, but reached conclusions as if the proposed reforms dislocated the joints of the empire. Some of them ascribed to Indian reformers the desire to destroy the actual mode of government in India by introducing full parliamentary government. They further imputed to them the wish that the people of India or their elected representatives should have complete power of the purse, and finally, that the official body should be placed in a minority in the Councils of India. As one of the Indian sympathisers in the Commons pointed out: "These comments remind me of the definition of a crab as 'a red fish which walks backwards'; a definition which is quite perfect as a definition were it not for the fact that a crab is not red, is not a fish, and does not walk backwards."<sup>96</sup>

In fact, misapprehensions in regard to reforms finally led the Conservative Government as well as the Liberal leaders not to take a decision about elective principles in Parliament, but to leave the matter to the Governor-General who, whether he was a Conservative or a Liberal, should go by the wishes of the ruling Cabinet rather than by the sentiment of the tiny Indian Parliamentary group. Curzon, therefore, made it clear in the Committee at the time of the finalisation of the Bill that,

"The object of the Government, and the object of this Bill, as I explained in the Debate on the Second Reading, is, in so far as the elective principle is capable of being introduced into India, to leave the manner, the date, and the mode of its

95 . LP, B.P. 7/17, Cross to Lansdowne, 1 April 1892.

96. PP, Commons, see Discussions on the Indian Councils Act (1861) Amendment Bill in the Committee, 25 April 1892.

introduction absolutely to the Viceroy. They are unwilling to interfere with his discretion in the matter. That is the intention of the Government, and that it is also a wise intention was recognised by no less an authority than the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Midlothian himself (Gladstone)."<sup>97</sup>

Parliament was indeed adopting a peculiar line of approach. It was its duty to define how India should be governed as it had done in the case of other colonies. To abdicate its authority to the Viceroy was like avoiding to take a decision out of expediency. Secondly, considering the fact the Councils of India had really very little to do with the Government of the country, adoption of a request from the Indian Congress for provision of some elected members in those bodies could not have been too radical a reform. If the elected members were considered dangerous, the Government's nominated non-official members could go to satisfy Indian demands. That was acceptable to most members of Parliament. But, however obedient or trusted the non-official members could be, if their number was only slightly more than small, the table might be turned against the Government. The following words of Curzon clarified the Government intention.

"I would also point out that if the number of non-official members were increased the number of official members would, in the same ratio, have to be increased, since it must be perfectly clear that the Government must be in a majority, and to increase the number of official members would be to take them away from important duties elsewhere. An increase of members, too, would tend to produce results which are inseparable from popular Assemblies; by that I mean more especially the creation of two Parties. You cannot have these Councils on the scale contemplated by the hon. Member (Member for Peterborough, Mr. Morton) without the formation of a Government Party and an Opposition Party, and such a position in India would not only result in friction, but in the dislocation of Government altogether. The right hon. Member for Midlothian (Gladstone) has described Opposition as being a position of greater freedom and less responsibility. But in India the Opposition would be all freedom and no responsibi-

97. PP, Commons, In the Committee, Curzon, 25 April 1892.

lity. Responsibility arises from the obligation to accept the results of Opposition; but in India that obligation can never arise, and it would be in the highest degree undesirable to promote that friction and possible hostility between Parties in these Councils which does not at present exist, and which I hope this House will do nothing to create.”<sup>98</sup>

At last the Bill was passed. The fuss about elective principles came to nothing. One of the pro-Congress Members satisfied himself by saying that, “The people of India may rest assured that when the Radicals of this country come into power—as they will no doubt before long—they will do what is just and right towards them, and enable them to assist in governing their own country in a better manner than it is governed at the present time.”<sup>99</sup>

The Indian Councils Act of 20 June 1892 contained the following provisions regarding the enlargement of the Indian Councils.

“1.—(1) The number of additional members of Council nominated by the Governor-General under the provisions of Section 10 of the Indian Councils Act, 1861, shall be such as to him may seem from time to time expedient, but shall not be less than 10 nor more than 16; and the number of additional members of Council nominated by the Governors of the presidencies of Fort St. George and Bombay respectively under the provisions of Section 29 of the Indian Councils Act, 1861, shall be such as to the said Governors respectively may seem from time to time expedient, but shall not be less than 8 nor more than 20.

“(2) It shall be lawful for the Governor-General in Council by proclamation from time to time to increase the number of councillors whom the Lieutenant-Governors of the Bengal Division of the Presidency of Fort William and of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh respectively may nominate for their assistance in making laws and regulations: Provided always, that not more than 20 shall be nominated for the Bengal Division, and not more than 15 for the North-Western

98. PP, Commons, In the Committee, Curzon, 25 April 1892.

99. PP, Commons, In the Committee, Morton, 25 April 1892.

Provinces and Oudh.”<sup>100</sup>

The Governor-General in Council was authorised to make laws and regulations regarding the discussion of the annual financial statement and the asking of questions. The Governors in Council were also given the same power. But, in essence, the Councils were to be given so little power that “no member at any such meeting of any Council shall have power to submit or propose any resolution, or to divide the Council in respect of any such financial discussion.”<sup>101</sup> Any rule to be made by a Governor in Council or by a Lieutenant-Governor in regard to their Councils was subject to the sanction of the Governor-General in Council, and any rule made by the Governor-General in Council was subject to the sanction of the Secretary of State in Council.

The Bill having been at last passed, the Conservative Government of Lord Salisbury decided to implement its rules and regulations at the earliest. A general election in Britain was near at hand. The Government was not sure of its victory. Cross therefore advised Lansdowne: “I am anxious that rules should be framed without delay. There will be no difficulty in drafting rules as to interpellation and discussion of the Budget. The procedure as to selecting Additional Members of Council presents some difficulties . . . The word of the Act, ‘Nomination’, still fixes due responsibility on the Governor-General and Governors, etc., whatever bodies may be consulted; and I presume the rules will be elastic, and not follow any one hard and fast line. Much must depend upon those in authority in India as to how to get the best men and among them the best of the Zamindars and a fair representation of the Mohammedans.”<sup>102</sup> He further reminded the Viceroy of what Sir Henry Maine has said in 1868 that “there would be no more dangerous ingredient in the Council than a large number of educated Bengalee Natives,” and asked him to carefully select members so as to keep the Councils as harmless as possible. Lord Cross satisfied himself that if the elections went against the Conservatives, “it will be a source of comfort

100. SD, *The Indian Councils Act*, 20 June 1892.

101. Ibid.

102. LP, B.P. 7/17, Cross to Lansdowne, 2 June 1892.



to me to think that I shall leave behind me yourself as Viceroy, and such good men in Madras and Bombay as Wenlock and Harris.”<sup>103</sup>

The elections went against the Conservatives. The Liberals came to power with the support of the Irish voters. The Conservatives very much regretted that the final sanction of rules and regulations under the Indian Councils Act of 1892 were to be left to other hands than their own. On 12 August 1892, Lord Cross wrote to the Viceroy: “This will be my last letter to you officially. I have already told you what a comfort it is to know that you are still there, so I will say no more. I only leave behind me two subjects of anxiety: 1st, The Rules under the Indian Councils Act, as to which I feel assured you will act with prudence. 2nd, The Amir.”<sup>104</sup>

The National Congress was waiting for the outcome of the long drawn out debates in Parliament stretching over years.

It was beginning to lose faith in the intentions of the House of Commons in matters of reforms. When it met at Allahabad in its eighth session in the winter of 1892, its president W.C. Bonnerjee commented:

“When any Indian question comes before the House of Commons, what do we see? The Cabinet of the day has always a majority in the House, and it always finds supporters among its own party, whether they are would-be-placemen or whether they are country gentlemen who go to the House of Commons as the best Club in England. And in non-party matters—and they make it a pretence in the House of Commons to regard Indian affairs as non-party matters—in all non-party matters, the Government of the day can always rely upon a large amount of support from the Opposition . . . Therefore, when you consider what the responsibility of the Government of India is to the Government of England and the House of Commons, you will not, I think, be able to come to any other conclusion than that it is nil.”<sup>105</sup> Regarding

103. LP, B.P. 7/17, Cross to Lansdowne, 22 June 1892.

104. Ibid, Cross to Lansdowne, 12 August 1892.

105. BML, 8023 aa 45, INC, Eighth Session, W.C. Bonnerjee, Allahabad, 1892.

the Act, the Congress passed a resolution saying that "the Act itself does not, in terms, concede to the people the right of electing their own representatives to the Council", but expressed its hope that "the rules, now being prepared under the Act, will be framed on the lines of Gladstone's declaration in the House of Commons, and will do adequate justice to the people of this country."<sup>106</sup>

The defeat of its hopes and expectations drove the Congress to adopt a posture of hostility. The closing decade of the nineteenth century saw the widening of the gulf. In another sense, it was like a lull before the storm which Lord Curzon and the National Congress hastened to stage, in the opening years of the twentieth century.

106. INC, Resolution I, 1892.

# 4

## Congress towards Agitation

IN the nineties of the nineteenth century an idea gained support in nationalist circles that the existence of the Congress should be made known to the British people in Britain itself. Unless Indian grievances were voiced where her rulers lived, so it was thought, resolutions passed in India would be like cries in wilderness. A proposal was mooted in 1891 that the meeting of the Congress should remain suspended in India until the Congress held a session at London.<sup>1</sup> This was, however, not a practical suggestion. A more viable idea was canvassed in some quarters that some Indian members should enter the House of Commons to carry to the Mother of Parliaments the hopes and desires of a subject population. Dadabhai Naoroji tried to accomplish this.

Dadabhai had once contested from Holborn on Liberal ticket, but lost. In 1892, he stood with greater determination from Central Finsbury. Lord Salisbury's description of him as 'the black man' encouraged Gladstone to lend him active support and Dadabhai won the election in July 1892. Among the Indian sympathisers in the Commons, an Indian himself took his seat. It was Congress constitutionalism at its best.

1. Sitaramaya, *History of Indian National Congress*, Vol. I, 83.

Some people, at that stage, even thought of the necessity of direct Indian representation in the House of Commons.

But days were running out for strictly constitutional behaviour. By 1892, Allan Octavian Hume was alarmed at the condition of the Indian peasant. Overwhelmed by apprehensions that the Indian system of administration was preparing the ground for 'one of the most terrible cataclysms in the history of the world', Hume wrote:

"No earthly power can stem a universal agrarian rising in a country like this. My countrymen will be as men in the desert, vainly struggling for a brief space, against the simoon. Thousands of the rioters may be killed, but to what avail, when there are millions on millions who have nothing to look forward to but death—nothing to hope for but vengeance; as for leaders—with the hour comes the man—be sure, there will be no lack of leaders. This is no hypothesis. It is a certainty."<sup>2</sup>

Hume had the foresight to understand what was likely to follow a decade or two later. Constitutional steps on the part of the Congress could not long remain a one-way traffic unless the Government reciprocated by taking that body into confidence for the general well-being of the people. Dadabhai Naoroji, whose action represented a constitutional gesture at its best, was as much a well-wisher of the British Government as of the Indian people. An Indian, he was the representative of a British electorate. A leader of the Indian Congress, he was a member of the British Parliament. A link between the political circles in India and England, his main objective was to establish a bridge of understanding between the two countries. As the Congress President in 1893, he made his principles known:

"Were we enemies of British rule, our best course would be not to cry out, but remain silent, and let the mischief take its course till it ends in disaster as it must. But we do not want that disaster and we therefore cry out, both for our own sake and for the sake of our rulers, this evil of poverty must be boldly faced and remedied."<sup>3</sup>

2. CC, 9-11.

3. CC, Dadabhai Naoroji, Lahore Session of the Congress, 1893.

Dadabhai, at that stage, also felt like some others that a Congress session should be held in England. "I can assure the Congress," he said, "that as I hope and wish, if you will pay an early visit to the United Kingdom and hold a session there, you will obtain a kind and warm reception from its peoples. And you will by such direct and personal appeal to the British Nation, accomplish a vast amount of good."<sup>4</sup> Such hopes, however, did not help bring about an understanding between the Congress and the British.

The Act of 1892 proved that the Government was not prepared to pay any heed to the public opinion in the country. Distrust for public men was deep-rooted in the minds of the bureaucrats. Sympathy of the leaders towards a people in distress inspired in the minds of the administrators a deep hatred towards public men, particularly of the Congress type. It was impossible for Hume or Naoroji to bridge that gulf.

The bureaucracy, on its part, was ever alert to any adverse Congress comment in regard to its performance and the Viceroy was fully behind the bureaucracy. To safeguard the position and prestige of the Indian administration against Congress representations to Parliament and the Cabinet, Lord Lansdowne, before he laid down the charge of Indian Viceroyalty, warned the Liberal Secretary of State Lord Kimberley: "I have always been scrupulously civil to the Congress, and have probably gone further than any of my predecessors in recognising it as a political factor, but we should, I think, be extremely careful to avoid the appearance of snubbing a Local Government at its request."<sup>5</sup>

The Congress selected Alfred Webb to preside over its tenth session at Madras in 1894. He was an Irishman. It was no secret that his nationality was the principal reason for his selection. In fact, he himself was aware of that. And, as President, he declared: "I hate tyranny and oppression wherever practised, more especially if practised by my own Government, for then I am in a measure responsible. I have felt the bitterness of subjection in my own country. I am a

4. BML, 8023 aa 45, INC. Address of Dadabhai Naoroji, Lahore, 1893.

5. LP, B.P. 7/17, Lansdowne to Kimberley, 4 January 1893.

member of the Irish Parliamentary Party, I am one of the Indian Parliamentary Committee.”<sup>6</sup>

Eardley Norton paid him a tribute for his life-long connection with the struggles of his own countrymen for liberty and self-government. Alfred Webb sang the song of an Irish poet on spirit of nationality:

“It whisper’d too that freedom’s ark,  
A service high and holy,  
Should not be marr’d by passions dark,  
And feelings vain and lowly.  
For Freedom comes from God’s right hand,  
And needs a goodly train;  
And righteous men must make our land,  
A nation once again.”<sup>7</sup>

The Irish philosophy was no doubt much welcome in India. Radical doctrines were slowly permeating Congress thoughts. The Liberal Ministry which came to power early in 1893 at the fall of the Conservatives was no less unhappy than its predecessors at the growth of Congress ideas. One thing became clear by that time. Whoever might hold the reins of administration in Britain, a distant echo of Congress criticism was bound to affect their Indian policies. Blatant abuse of power could not pass unchallenged any longer. Minor irregularities, too, did not escape comments and scrutiny inside Parliament, from, of course, Indian sympathisers supported at times by some opposition Members belonging to either of the great parties then in opposition. An interesting example of how even a Secretary of State for India had to come under pressure of criticisms is given below.

When the Conservative Ministry fell in 1892 and the Liberal Party formed the Government, Earl of Kimberley was made the Secretary of State for India, combining with that office the office of the Lord President of the Council. The Government which made that arrangement felt that the double appointment of Lord Kimberley would save the country from payment of the salary attached to the functions of President of the Council.

6. CC, Alfred Webb, December 1894,

7. Ibid,

But the *Times of India*, an English newspaper published from Bombay and which leaned more to the Civil Service than to the people, commented thus on 16 September 1892:

"If it be true, as alleged, that the whole of Lord Kimberley's salary is to be borne by the Indian Government despite the fact that he holds a second office also, there is certainly ground for complaint, though the relief would no doubt be slight enough. The pay of the President of the Council is £2,000; but although the two offices are combined in Lord Kimberley's case, the double office does not carry extra salary, so that it would only be just if a moiety of two-fifths of Lord Kimberley's pay were borne by the Home Government."<sup>8</sup>

Early in 1893 the issue was raised in Parliament. In the Lords, Lord Stanley of Alderley said: "This was a most unblushing avowal of shabby economy—an arrangement which was discreditable to the country and to the First Lord of the Treasury (Gladstone) who has made it. It was part too of the prevalent system of bribing voters with other people's money."<sup>9</sup> It was pointed out how a saving to the Indian Government of even £2,000 per annum was something, even though the emoluments of the Secretary of State, Under Secretaries, and Members of the Council, etc., amounted annually to £134,070 in those days. Lord Kimberley tried to justify the arrangement by saying:

"If it is the case—and I admit this argument might be used—that the duties I have to perform as President of the Council would prevent to that extent my discharging the duties of Secretary of State for India, then I fully admit that the Indian tax payer would have a right to complain. But if I succeed in adequately discharging the duties of Secretary of State for India, in what respect can the Indian tax payer be injured? The salary of £2,000, I may tell my noble Friend, is fixed by Act of Parliament, and it is my duty to perform all the business the Secretary of State for India has to perform to the best of my ability."<sup>10</sup>

Whether the argument was convincing or not, a much

8. *The Times of India*, 16 September 1892.

9. PP, Lords, Lord Stanley of Alderley, 13 February 1893.

10. PP, Lords, Lord Kimberley, 13 February, 1893.

bigger issue on which the Indian leaders had raised their voice much earlier, got tagged to the question of Kimberley's pay. Why should India pay for all the expenses of the India Office and for the Secretary of State's salary in England? The Earl of Northbrook questioned: "He would ask the Marquis of Ripon, who had filled the office of Viceroy of India, and was now Secretary of State for the Colonies, whether the colonies paid his salary; and, if not, the reason why the Indian tax payer should pay that of the Secretary of State for India?"<sup>11</sup> That bigger issue was not pursued at that time. But poor Lord Kimberley had to face the embarrassment of the minor irregularity committed by Gladstone himself. Even the Marquis of Salisbury, the Conservative Opposition Leader and by no means a friend of the Indian Congress, said:

"Of course, £2,000 a year is not a matter of great importance either to English or Indian Exchequer, but it does represent a new departure of principle . . . The question is, whether you have a right to use an officer paid by the Indian Treasury to do English work? That is the question . . . You must not measure a financial injury by the number of thousand pounds involved. If people feel that their money is being taken from them, it matters very little whether it figures as thousands or tens of thousands. I regret the arrangement very much."<sup>12</sup>

Kimberley did not resign as Secretary of State at once, but he had to go anyway after a face-saving lapse of time. The episode only proved how sensitive was the public opinion in India and England on matters of financial relation. The economic condition of India in the nineties of the nineteenth century had become so desperate that the Cabinet could not deal with Indian finances disregarding the feelings of the National Congress.

In fact, the attention of the Congress had been focussed on Home Charges and military expenditure right from the beginning, but as the charges were not likely to be reduced, bitter criticism of those expenses became inevitable. When Lord Northbrook pleaded in Parliament for a reduction of Home

11. PP, Lords, Earl of Northbrook, 13 February 1893.

12. PP, Lords, Marquis of Salisbury, 13 February 1893.



Charges, the Congress passed a resolution at its Lahore Session in 1893 that, "This Congress tenders its most sincere thanks to Lord Northbrook for his powerful advocacy of India's claim to have her burden of Home Charges reduced, and respectfully entreats the House of Commons to appoint at an early date a Committee of their Hon'ble House to arrive at some equitable settlement of the matter."<sup>13</sup> At that time Gopal Krishna Gokhale referred to what the Duke of Argyll had argued that "the grievance should be remedied before the impression got abroad in India that there was such a grievance."<sup>14</sup> Next year, Eardley Norton went to the extent of telling the Congress in Madras: If the Secretary of State is to be controlled by the Council, then abolish the Secretary of State. If the Council is to be controlled by the Secretary of State, then abolish the Council. The dual existence is useless, dangerous, expensive and obstructive."<sup>15</sup> Even, in the Imperial Legislative Council of India, a non-official European Member, Griffith Evans, criticised the Home Charges by referring to the tendencies 'on the part of the various departments in England to shove everything they can on India: e.g. mission to Persia or China'. "The India Office Charges also appear to be on a lavish scale," he said.<sup>16</sup>

India was further doomed to an economic crisis because of the British monetary policy. While the Government of India received its revenues in silver, it had very large fixed liabilities for payment in England in gold. With a constantly accelerated depreciation of silver as compared with gold, the burden of silver payments was constantly increasing. The result was an alarming fall in the gold price of the rupee, with the inevitable consequence of a very large increase of the silver burden of the Government of India. In these circumstances, the only recourse open to the Indian Government was additional taxation in some form or other.<sup>17</sup> But the Congress

13. INC, Resolution XVII, 1893.

14. See Sitaramayya, *History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. I, 80.

15. Ibid, 81.

16. Proceedings of the Imperial Legislative Council of India, 1893, Speech of Griffith Evans at the Budget Session.

17. PP, Commons, see Debate on Her Majesty's Speech, 13 March 1894,

was ready to criticise sharply any move of the Government which went against the economic interests of India. When the authorities thought of an excise duty on cotton, the Congress passed the following resolution in 1894: "(a) That this Congress respectfully enters its emphatic protest against the injustice and impolicy of imposing excise duty on cottons manufactured in British India, as such excise is calculated to cripple seriously the infant Mill Industries of this country; (b) That this Congress puts on record its firm conviction that in proposing this excise the interests of India have been sacrificed to those of Lancashire, and it strongly deprecates any such surrender of Indian interests by the Secretary of State."<sup>18</sup>

In the last decade of the nineteenth century two distinguished individuals rose to prominence to represent the Congress ideologies in a somewhat more determined manner. They were Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Gopal Krishna Gokhale, both of them having made their first appearance in the Congress in 1889. While Tilak became militant against the foreign rule, Gokhale became very critical of its policies. They were responsible in carrying the Congress to a posture of direct confrontation with the authorities.

From the inception of the Congress, the British Parliament hated the Congress literature more than the Congress organisation. By Congress literature they understood not the official writings, resolutions or announcements of the party, but the several newspapers, journals and pamphlets which got inspiration from the Congress movement or were controlled by individual Congressmen. Papers such as Tilak's *Kesari* alarmed the Government greatly. Tilak tried to expose the various evils of an alien rule without fear of punishment. For example, on 2 February 1892 the *Kesari* published an article on the plight of the ryots, containing such attacks on Government as:

"Out of every twenty Indians, nineteen depend on agriculture directly or indirectly; but if we consider the deplorable plight of those who till the land, our hair would stand on end. Poverty rules the roost... The Government is frankly mercenary in character, so there need not be any hope of

18. INC, Resolution I, 1894.

concessions. Let there be harvest or no harvest, let the dependant of the peasant die or go to jail; the tax has to be paid within the stipulated period . . . Once matters come to a head, the easiest way to stop people from grumbling was to appoint a Commission, and our Government is very fond of this civilized remedy of the nineteenth century!"<sup>19</sup>

Tilak's political and literary activities were being noted in official circles with anger and anxiety. Gokhale, on the other hand, was out to criticise the bureaucracy for its negative attitude towards Indian aspirations. The Reform Act of 1892 had denied to Indians the right to elect their representatives, but had yet held some hope that the Viceroy might make rules to provide elections if and when circumstances so permitted. To Gokhale such pretensions deserved condemnation. Regarding the so-called rules, therefore, he declared: "I will not say that they have been deliberately so framed as to defeat the object of the Act of 1892, but I will say this, that if the officer who drafted them had been asked to sit down with the deliberate purpose of framing a scheme to defeat that object, he could not have done better."<sup>20</sup>

The Act of 1892 revealed its inadequacy to such an extent that many in the Congress ranks became skeptical about its efficacy. When the rules were being framed, Woomesh Chandra Bonnerjee declared: "I am afraid that some of our rulers have been possessed with the idea that we have been progressing too fast. It is a great pity that this should be so. But if these rules do not come up to our expectations, gentlemen, we must go on with our agitation and not stop until we get what we all think and we all believe and, what is more, what our rulers themselves have taught us to believe, we have a right to get."<sup>21</sup> Lord Lansdowne, the Viceroy, was in real difficulty. "I have seen it not infrequently stated," he complained, "that the Government of India had strenuously opposed the introduction of anything approaching to the elective principle into the Bill", and tried his best to remove such misgivings by

19. *Kesari*, 2 February 1892.

20. Sitaramayya, *History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. I, 89.

21. INC, Presidential Address of W.C. Bonnerjee, Allahabad Session 1892,

praising the rules thus:

“It is not unlikely that our proposals will disappoint the expectations of those who would gladly see us travel further and faster along the path of reform. We claim, however, for the changes which we have been instrumental in procuring that they will, beyond all question, greatly increase the usefulness and the authority of these legislative bodies. We are able to show that the number of Additional Members has been materially increased; that we have considerably widened the functions of the Councils by the admission of the right of interpellation and the discussion of the Financial Statement; and, finally, that we shall no longer rely on nomination, pure and simple, for the selection of Additional Members. These are all substantial steps in advance.”<sup>22</sup>

These were substantial steps no doubt. But the Viceroy, while trying to select Additional Members through a crude machinery of election, made it perfectly clear that the ultimate selection of the members ‘rests with the Government, and not with the electors’. Furthermore, he wanted ‘to obtain for these Councils the services of Members who will be in the truest sense representative, but who will represent types and classes rather than areas and numbers’.<sup>23</sup> It was the beginning of an experiment in India with a kind of representative system which complicated politics without furthering popular interest. Criticising the policy of the Government of India, Alfred Webb declared in his Presidential address at the Madras session of the Congress in 1894:

“The administrative mutilation of the manifest intentions of Parliament in framing the Indian Councils Act is much to be deplored. I see that complaints have been made in every Province where the enlarged Councils are established, that the distribution of seats for representation of the people is most unsatisfactory, and that, while some interests are over-represented, other important interests are not represented at all. This is not in accordance with the expressed views of British statesmen on both sides of the House when the Bill was

22. Proceedings of the Imperial Legislative Council, 1893, Address of Lansdowne, 16 March 1893.

23. *Ibid*,

discussed.”<sup>24</sup>

The Congress understood the game of how the Indian administration defeated the intentions of parliamentary legislation. Within a short time the real nature of the political concession came to light. “In Bengal,” said Surendranath Banerjee, “a population of 70 millions is represented by only seven elected members, or, if you like, by 10 members if you take the nominated non-official members to represent the people, or by 20 members if you take the whole Council to represent the province.”<sup>25</sup> As the elections were taking place under a system of rotation, whole divisions of the province were left unrepresented. For example, out of six divisions in Bengal at that time, even the most important division, namely, the Presidency Division, together with the adjacent divisions of Chhota Nagpur and Orissa, were left out of representation. All over India, the inadequacy of the Act became apparent, and the Congress continued to propagate against it.

In the meantime, the hope that Dadabhai Naoroji’s election to the British House of Commons from Central Finsbury in 1892 would lead to something big in politics came to nothing. His success at the poll was a matter of great joy in Congress circles. No other Indian at that time could have adorned that position with universal admiration as Naoroji. “If the twenty-eight crores of Indians,” said Tilak, “were entitled to send only one member to the British Parliament, there is no doubt that we would have elected Dadabhai Naoroji unanimously to grace that post.”<sup>26</sup> But some people sceptically argued, that if Ireland, having eighty M.Ps. in the British Parliament could not wrest its right, what would Dadabhai alone be able to do?<sup>27</sup> The hope was that while the Congress would keep up the pressure for reforms, Dadabhai should keep on trying to persuade Englishmen to agree to Indian demands.

Unfortunately, Dadabhai Naoroji did not continue in the Commons for long. In the election of 1895 he was not returned by his electorate.

24. INC, Presidential Address of Alfred Webb, Madras Session, 1894.

25. INC, Presidential Address of S.N. Banerjee, Poona Session, 1895.

26. *Kesari*, 12 July 1892.

27. *Ibid.*

Naoroji's absence was more than compensated by the presence of William Wedderburn in the Commons. For a number of years he remained the staunchest advocate of Indian grievances in Parliament and fought against the Conservatives and Liberals whenever necessary. After Charles Bradlaugh no other parliamentarian championed the cause of India more vigorously than Wedderburn. He felt sorry that Naoroji was not there to 'speak more authoritatively on behalf of the Indian people' but took upon himself that great responsibility.

The last five years of the nineteenth century proved a critical time from economic point of view. Three of the worst famines of the country occurred during that brief period. That was again the time when the Government was obliged to increase the burden of the Indian tax payers to meet the needs of military expeditions outside and military occupation of large areas of unproductive territory on the frontiers of India. The Liberal Government had involved itself in Chitral affairs and the Conservative Government kept up the tempo by invading the territory of Swat. Enormous forces were required to face the hostile tribes of those difficult territories. Describing the frontier adventures of the Government, J.M. Maclean, a friend of the National Congress, criticised both Liberals and Tories: "It was India who paid the whole cost of all these expeditions; and the worst of those annexations was that they had been wholly unproductive. Even the Kingdom of Burma, which was flourishing when we took it over, cost India a million a year . . . Most of the other annexations not only paid nothing at all, but were very largely subsidised by the Indian Government. India now subsidised all Central Asia from the Indus to the Oxus. The Government either enlisted men of these border tribes in our army and continually increased their pay, or else paid them blackmail to keep the peace."<sup>28</sup>

Of the £50 millions of revenue, it was said, fully one-half went to England, and a very large proportion of the remainder was spent on troops and expeditions on the frontiers. The funds which the Government required to fight famines were not there in the treasury. The Congress was well aware of the

28. PP, Commons, J.M. Maclean, 3 September 1895.

financial injustice to which India was subjected. Besides the army and the navy which milched the Indian cow white, and the cost of expeditions which proved too much, there were other burdens also of a very unreasonable character. For example, India was charged with the cost of operations in the Persian Gulf. Aden was no concern of India at all. It was an imperial route to every British possession in the east, to Zanzibar, Ceylon, Hong Kong, Australia and New Zealand, and also to far eastern markets of China and Japan. Yet, "the perishing ryots of Jubbalpore must pay for its protection, and rich Britain throws on poor India the entire cost of protecting the Eastern Seas."<sup>29</sup> The Congress resentment against such financial arrangements was voiced in Parliament by William Wedderburn.

Lord George Hamilton, the Conservative Secretary of State from 1895, realised the difficulties arising out of 'falling exchange, increased military establishments, frontier complications', etc., but his real anxiety was over the increasing Congress criticism. Greater fear resulted from parliamentary discussions which in those days were fully utilised by the Indian Press to influence public opinion against any ruling party. Economic situation in India was getting out of control. Adverse opinions in Parliament had their repercussion on Indian soil. The Viceroy and his bureaucracy were losing their prestige before an otherwise respectful populace because of parliamentary criticism, Indian Press and Congress propaganda. The latter two could be dealt with sternly. But the first was a real problem. For any Indian Viceroy, Parliament was his sovereign master. What Parliament spoke of his administration, no matter even if the criticism came from only one man, carried sufficient weight to damage his sovereign supremacy, and in the usual process when the words of Parliament were discussed in the Press, the bureaucracy found itself in an unenviable position, without any power to hand out punishment, George Hamilton appealed to Parliament for moderation while discussing India. He requested:

"The position of the Indian Government is truly anomalous. We have established at the other end of the world a

29. CC, R.M. Sayani, Congress President, December 1896.

great Government, and given it control over something like one-sixth of the human race. We have invested the head of that Government with all the pomp and paraphernalia of an omnipotent and of a final authority. Few monarchs have greater power, or are surrounded with greater pomp. And yet there is not a single detail in the administration of that continent, and not one iota of the policy of the Indian Government, which may not at any moment be called in question and reversed by an elective assembly sitting thousands of miles from the seat of action. The whole fabric of the Indian Government is based on an Act of Parliament. We wish to infuse into the Indian Government what we may call the elements of progress, of stability, and continuity, and yet we are forced by our political institutions to subject that Government to the wishes of any ephemeral majority that the electoral whim of the moment may create. These difficulties have been avoided in the past by the moderation and discretion with which this House individually and collectively has made use of this absolute power; and I have very much mistaken the character of this new House of Commons if I did not believe that the discretion will still continue.’<sup>30</sup>

But William Wedderburn was not convinced. If India was not administered for the benefit of the Indians and as long as the interests of the people of India were not separated from the interests of the people of England, criticism in Parliament appeared to him useful and inevitable. Moreover, there were two very antagonistic views on Indian subjects, the European official view and the Indian public opinion in respect of all questions. While the official side had the power to present their opinion with complete authority to the highest places, the dumb millions went unheard. In view of these realities, Parliament had a duty to hear Indian problems even though it caused the bureaucracy discomfiture.

The British Government itself had been so non-ethical in regard to Indian finance that examples of ‘melancholy meanness’ were glaring enough to draw criticism from select individuals. A grand ball was organised to please the Sultan



of Turkey for which India had to pay £10,000. The doctrine was, as John Morley pointed out, that Britain might fairly charge India any amount for any purpose in the name of India's interests. When certain envoys were maltreated by King Theodore in Abyssinia, it was gravely argued in Parliament whether it was to the interest of India that semi-barbarous potentates should be taught that they could not with impunity ill-treat the envoys of Her Majesty's Government—not in India, but in Africa.<sup>31</sup>

Wedderburn regarded 'both Parties as sinners in respect to their dealings with India'.<sup>32</sup> Whenever he got an opportunity, he drew the attention of the Commons to the hardship of India arising out of an unjust economic system. A great famine was raging over vast areas through the year 1896. The Congress was bitter over the inadequate relief measures. Early in 1897 during the debate on the Queen's Address, Wedderburn appealed to Government to realise the nature and magnitude of the calamity. He described how the so-called methods of State relief, the expenditure on famine relief, aggravated the situation. Millions might be spent, yet, as he asked and answered:

"But where would this money come from? It would not come down from the clouds. It would have to be raised by the taxation of the masses; the dying would be fed at the expense of the hungry survivors, making the survivors more destitute, more heavily burdened, and less able to resist hunger and disease."<sup>33</sup>

Wedderburn felt it his duty to place before the House the Indian view of the calamity. Side by side, he disclosed the sources of his information as "from his friend Mr. Naoroji, who was both a trusted representative of his Indian fellow countrymen and a true well wisher of British rule; from the Indian Press, and from the resolutions of the Indian National Congress, which gave voice to public feeling in India."<sup>34</sup>

Wedderburn perhaps did not know that to counteract his voice on behalf of India, the British diplomacy had already been applied to bring into the House of Commons of 1897 an

31. PP, Commons, see comments of John Morley, 6 July 1896.

32. PP, Commons, William Wedderburn, 6 July 1896.

33. Ibid, 26 January 1897.

34. Ibid.

Indian, elected from the English constituency of Benthall Green. He was Mancherjee Bhownaggee. A loyal supporter of the British rule and an admirer of the Indian bureaucracy, he was a vehement opponent of the National Congress. His election to the Commons was a masterstroke of British statesmanship. He was brought to oppose Wedderburn and every other Indian sympathiser in the Commons, and to depict the Indian problems in a way which would please the Governments of India and Britain.

The House was deliberating over the Indian famine in January 1897. Bhownaggee made his presence felt at once and in an interesting manner. Amid cheers and laughter in the House, he declared that he did not pretend to represent the whole of India as Wedderburn wished the House to believe that he did, and that he was not a member of that microscopic body, the British Indian Committee. Wedderburn had moved an amendment to the Queen's Address to draw the attention of the House to the Indian famine. Bhownaggee got up to oppose it saying:

"The hon. Baronet (Wedderburn) said that his Amendment contained self-evident proposition; but the whole tenor of the Amendment, and the manner in which it was proposed, were simply calculated to advertise a certain class of agitators, who were never tired of impressing upon the people of India the inadequacy of British rule and the want of sympathy between the rulers and the ruled (cheers). The hon. Baronet said that he was uttering the sentiments expressed by Indian public opinion. Where had Indian public opinion called for this inquiry? Had not that opinion been manufactured in a small room, not far from the House of Commons; sent out thence to India; brought back in the form of newspaper articles; and passed off on the House of Commons as the public opinion of three hundred millions of people? (cheers and laughter). These proceedings were not worthy of one who had been a Member of the Government of India, and who was now a Member of the House of Commons."<sup>35</sup>

The House was pleased to hear for the first time from an

35. PP, Commons, M.M. Bhownaggee, 26 January 1897.

Indian the nature of the Indian politics. Bhownaggee described how by the next mail the news of Wedderburn's Amendment would go to the people of India and the story told that the great and only friend of India in Parliament was Wedderburn. He criticised the Congress for its attitudes and policies. Regarding the British Indian Committee, he said:

"The Congress was represented by a microscopic body called the British Indian Committee, which gathered up a few school boys studying for the Bar—and the great lights of which were the hon. Member for Banff (Wedderburn) and the other hon. Gentleman (Naoroji) whom his constituents would not again return (laughter). This Committee, in confidential letters which somehow became public, applied to the Congress to be supplied with the hard cash without which it could not carry on its great work in Parliament. And when this appeal for hard cash was not responded to, the Committee, by measures such as this Amendment, tried to impress its importance and its existence on the people of India. The complaint of this Committee was, 'We have piped unto you, and ye will not dance; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented'.'"<sup>36</sup>

Bhownaggee hoped that it was the last time that he discharged the painful duty of protesting against these manoeuvres which did no good to India, and which promoted dissatisfaction in place of gratitude for which the British Government had established a claim on the Indian people.

Bhownaggee deserved to be exposed. C.E. Schwann, the Member for Manchester North pointed out: "It was not difficult to find the cause for the splenetic utterance of the hon. Member (Bhownaggee) . . . The hon. Gentleman had recently returned from India, where he had gone with the expectation that he would he received with the same outburst of popular enthusiasm that had greeted Mr. Naoroji, but his mission had been a complete fiasco . . . A people, whether they were four millions or three hundred millions, knew their friends, and it was absurd to contend that a small body of men could have engineered the receptions which had been given

36. PP, Commons, M.M. Bhownaggrce, 26 January 1897.

to Mr. Naoroji.”<sup>37</sup>

Wedderburn demanded ‘a full inquiry into the condition of the masses of the people of India’. The Secretary of State knew that such an enquiry was bound to cover every act of the whole administration of India, judicial, administrative, and financial. Wedderburn wanted to press for an enquiry into the causes of Indian poverty. But the Secretary of State cleverly retorted that such an enquiry would ultimately lead to investigators “to go also into every custom, tradition, or habit of these 300,000,000 of people, and to discuss even every variety of their married life from polygamy to polyandry.” Relying on Bhownagree’s arguments George Hamilton proceeded to discredit Wedderburn by charging that the demand for enquiry, etc., emanated from the National Congress, a body that “never loses an opportunity of attacking the Indian Administration and of endeavouring to diminish the influence of that administration over the people of India.” “I say,” declared George Hamilton, “the forces of civilisation were never better organised than they are now to fight against pestilence and famine and those gentlemen who meet in the Indian Congress know that no native rulers ever attempted to oppose the advance of famine on so large and so successful a scale as the English rulers of India are doing now. Yet those gentlemen find fault with all that has been done: and they insist upon a national appeal to the country . . .”<sup>38</sup> The Secretary of State read out the text of resolution of the National Congress in the House of Commons:

“This Congress deplores the outbreak of famine in a more or less acute form throughout India, and holds that this and other famines which have occurred in recent years are due to the great poverty of the people, brought on by the drain of the wealth of the country, which has been going on for years together, and by the excessive taxation and over assessment consequent on a policy of extravagance followed by the Government, both in the Civil and the Military Departments, which has so far impoverished the people, that at the first

37. PP, Commons, C.E. Schwann, 26 January 1897.

38. PP, Commons, George Hamilton, 26 January 1897.

touch of scarcity they are rendered helpless and must perish unless fed by the State or helped by private charity. In the opinion of this Congress the true remedy against the recurrence of famine lies in the adoption of a policy which would enforce economy, husband the resources of the State, and foster the development of indigenous and local arts and industries; which have practically been extinguished, and help the introduction of modern arts and industries. In the meantime the Congress would remind the Government of its solemn duty to save human life and mitigate human suffering, and would appeal to the Government to redeem its pledges by restoring the famine insurance fund to its original footing, and to apply it more largely to its original purpose—viz., the immediate relief of the famine-stricken people.”<sup>39</sup>

Commenting on the resolution, George Hamilton said, “Everyone that was at the Congress must know that that resolution is both ungracious and ungrateful.”<sup>40</sup> The Conservative side greeted his statement with cheers and the Secretary of State proceeded to advise Wedderburn that since one of the great evils of India was the exploitation of people by money-lenders, and since the latter were represented in the Indian National Congress, Wedderburn should better induce them to exercise their power in a humane manner. It was an indirect way of criticising the Congress as a body of rich people who were not far from exploiting the poor.

The famine of 1896 caused considerable hardship to the people. Amid growing popular discontent, Bal Gangadhar Tilak began to advocate militant nationalism. To rouse mass consciousness against British rule, he organised celebrations of Shivaji’s birthday. Shivaji came to symbolise the spirit of resistance and the will to struggle against what one considered unjust oppression by government. The masses clearly understood the significance of the Shivaji festival. The British rule was alien, oppressive and unjust, and had to be challenged. Tilak was with the people in their economic distress. He served the rural millions during the famine of 1896 by opening

39. PP, Commons, George Hamilton, 26 January, 1897. (This Resolution was passed at the twelfth Congress in December 1896.)

40. Ibid.

cheap grain shops. He pleaded with the Government for liberal relief measures.

It was an unhappy coincidence that a virulent form of plague broke out in Bombay Presidency, while the famine raged in villages. Tilak offered to work as a volunteer with the plague inspectors. Acceptance of his advice at that time could have helped the Government servants in tackling the situation intelligently. But the plague officers, in order to apply stricter measures to prevent plague, behaved harshly with simpler folks without visualising the likely consequences.

It was said that the soldiers employed for the purpose insulted women and defiled places of worship. The *Maratha* complained: "Plague is more merciful to us than its human prototypes now reigning in the city." Excesses committed by certain officers led to widespread discontent, which culminated at last in violence. On 22 June 1897, two European officers, Mr. Rand and Lieutenant Ayerst were killed in Poona.

These political murders arising out of nationalist extremism were viewed by British Parliament with concern. It was ironical that it was left to the Indian Member Bhownagree to stand up and to define the character of the Poona outrages in the House of Commons on 15 July 1897. Describing the background he showed how 'in the last two years an annual celebration to stir up disaffection against England among the natives of India has been set on foot under the designation of the Shivajee Accession Ceremony'; how in the second week of June 1897 such celebrations took place on a large scale in Poona where the sayings of French Revolutionaries that 'they were not murdering men but simply removing the thorns in their way' were preached, and how Tilak presided at the celebration and made a speech "in which he counselled the murder of Europeans, and that the *malachchas*, that is, the British, had no charter from God to rule India". Bhownagree demanded to know "whether any steps have been taken by the Local authorities to stop such systematic training of large numbers of people and students, and the incitement of them to such actions as led to assassination of Mr. Rand and Lieutenant Ayerst within a week of the last Shivajee celebration?"<sup>41</sup>

41. PP, Commons, M.M. Bhownagree, 15 July 1897.

On 26 July 1897, order was issued to prosecute Tilak. On 14 September, Justice Strachey sentenced him to eighteen months' rigorous imprisonment and denied him the right of appeal. In England, H.H. Asquith tried in vain to save Tilak.\* William Wedderburn made a moving speech in Parliament to defend Tilak against the wrath of the Government and pleaded for a reconsideration of the verdict on him. "I wish rather to make an appeal to the justice and the prudence and the humanity of the Government and of this House" he began. Narrating the background, he pointed out to the suffering of the people from almost every possible calamity—famine, plague, war and earthquake, and how those sufferings were aggravated by the very measures taken for their relief. Measures, such as, segregation for the plague, were, of course, necessary and well-intentioned, but as Wedderburn described, they meant fresh hardships to the people as they invaded the domestic privacy which, to Indians, was dearer than life itself. The providing of punitive police, imprisonment without trial, and extensive changes in criminal law, etc., drove people to despair. Referring to the consequent murder of the Europeans, Wedderburn said: "It would seem to have been a mere attack of solitary fanaticism; it does not appear from the evidence that there was any conspiracy in the matter."<sup>42</sup> Therefore, punishment to Tilak was uncalled for. He appealed to the Secretary of State: "Mr. Tilak is a scholar and a man who has done good services as an educationist and as a legislator. Perhaps the noble Lord may see his way to mitigate the severe sentence that was passed upon Mr. Tilak by, at any rate, remitting the penalty of hard labour which condemns him to prison dress and association with the lowest class of criminals."<sup>43</sup> George Hamilton, the Secretary of State gave a caustic reply:

\* Professor Max Muller, William Wilson Hunter, Richard Garth, William Caine and a few others presented an appeal to Queen Victoria to grant reprieve, as a result of which Tilak was released on 6 September 1898. Damodar Hari Chapekar and his brother were executed for the Poona murders.

<sup>42</sup>. PP, Commons, Wedderburn, 17 February 1898.

<sup>43</sup>, Ibid,

“We have had famine in India over an area inhabited by 64 millions of people, and, besides that, we have had the plague in Bombay. But we have heard no word of this from the hon. Baronet to-night. He has directed his attention only to Poona; and it is not even for the people there that he is concerned, but simply for three or four friends of his own. Well, it is with those three or four friends of his that we have had to deal. And why? Because they had done everything in their power to thwart the benevolent measures designed by the Indian Government. There is undoubted evidence that there was a dangerous conspiracy at Poona, and the outcome of that conspiracy was the murder of Mr. Rand and Lieutenant Ayerst.”<sup>44</sup>

Wedderburn had advised Hamilton to follow the benevolent policy of Lord Ripon in dealing with Indian questions. In the light of the aspirations of the educated Indians, conciliatory measures were necessary to calm down the unhappy feelings in India. But to Hamilton:

“The hon. Baronet has expressed the hope that I shall be able in some way to imitate the acts of Lord Ripon. Well, I do not doubt Lord Ripon’s good intentions, but everybody who knows anything about India to-day knows that Lord Ripon contrived to raise a racial feeling in India, and from that time to this no question in India is judged on its merits, but simply as a question between race and race, and one of the difficulties we have to face is to try and allay the race feelings which Lord Ripon’s Administration aroused.”<sup>45</sup>

Hamilton told the Commons that not all educated Indians were the friends of the British. Some of the advanced Indians attributed all the evils from which India suffered to the ‘unrighteous and iniquitous system of the British Government’. Some others, who enjoyed high positions, tried to instil ‘grotesque falsehoods into the rising generation of India’. Describing Wedderburn as a friend of such natives, the Secretary of State warned him: “He must either assimilate his language inside this House to his language outside the House, or he

44. PP, Commons, George Hamilton, 17 February 1898.

45. Ibid.



must leave us to judge him by what he says outside, and not inside the House."<sup>46</sup>

The Conservative Government was determined to root out any terroristic movement in India. The supporters of the National Congress in Parliament while debating on the Queen's speech in February 1898 moved an amendment: "We humbly assure Your Majesty that this House regards with grave concern the policy of internal repression lately adopted by the Government of India, and especially the deportation and continued imprisonment of British Indian subjects without trial, the recent series of Press prosecutions, and the present proposals to increase the severity of the Law relating to sedition in India."<sup>47</sup> Such pro-Indian expressions, however had no effect on the general policies of the Government.

The Congress felt bitter at the language of the Anglo-Indian Press which propagated about dark designs behind the Poona murder. The Indian bureaucracy supported the theories of the anti-Indian Press. "Almost every incident that took place in Poona was pressed into the service to support this theory of conspiracy, and an attack was commenced on the vernacular Press and the educated Indians, perhaps unexampled in its virulence since the Mutiny," lamented the Congress President, C. Sankaran Nair.<sup>48</sup> The repeated charge of the authorities that the vernacular Press promoted sedition pained the Congress leaders greatly. They deplored the murder, but side by side they also deplored the idea that the murders were the result of a deep conspiracy. The measures which the Government ultimately brought about to deal with the situation which was considered serious, coupled with the severe measures already forced upon the people in the name of plague control, created a sense of deep resentment in nationalist quarters. Speaking in condemnation of the new Law of Sedition at a meeting held in London on 20 June 1898, R.C. Dutt said: "It is with deep regret that I have to say that I can hardly remember any time—and my memory

46. PP, Commons, George Hamilton, 17 February 1898.

47. PP, Commons, Herbert Roberts, 18 February 1898.

48. BML, 8023 aa 45, INC, Address of C. Sankaran Nair, Amravati, 1897,

goes back to the time of the Mutiny—when the confidence of the people of India in the justice and fair-play of English Rulers was so shaken as it has been within the last two years.”<sup>49</sup>

Rise of terrorism in India obviously called for a strong administration under a strong Viceroy. The Conservatives in power were in complete agreement among themselves that Ripon-type persons were perfectly unsuitable to rule the empire. Hence was the search for a right person, and at last it was George Nathaniel Curzon who was selected for the office.

Lord Curzon landed in India at a time when the National Congress was sitting in Madras in its fourteenth session at the close of December 1898. The Congress was aware of Curzon’s words of sympathy for the people of India while he discussed imperial issues in Parliament. While lamenting the sad demise of Gladstone, the Congress, out of etiquette, offered its hearty welcome to the new Viceroy. “That saintly statesman (Gladstone) to whom,” declared the Congress President, “politics was a part of his religion; the Christian Warrior who fought the fight of freedom for England, and not for England alone; whom Bulgaria and Greece, whom Armenia and Italy, even distant India, mourns no less than his own country . . .

“But from the great Englishman who has passed away, let us turn to another Englishman—the greatest by virtue of his position during his stay amongst us, the august representative of our Beloved Sovereign—who tomorrow will land on India’s shores. I am sure, Brother-Delegates, I give expression to your unanimous feeling when, on your behalf, I tender our cordial welcome to Lord Curzon . . . To Lord Curzon will fall the honour of carrying for the first time the British Administration of a United India to a New Century.”<sup>50</sup>

As Curzon landed in Bombay and drove through the streets to Malabar Point, it was a very remarkable spectacle for him and far exceeded anything which he had thought of an oriental reception. “The streets,” wrote Curzon, “were densely lined with people and in the most crowded parts of the city extending for 3-4 miles there was a continuous roar of cheering

49. BML, 8023 aa 45, see quotation of R.C. Dutt in address of A.M. Bose, Fourteenth Congress, Madras, 1898.

50. BML, 8023 aa 45, INC, Address of A.M. Bose, Madras, 1898,

such as one might expect from an English Crowd. One of the staff with us who had seen three other Viceregal receptions in Bombay said that none of them had approached this in the numbers and cordiality of the welcome."<sup>51</sup> Lord Curzon was still in Bombay when the year 1898 closed. When he reached Calcutta, and was sworn in, it was 1899. A large crowd, bigger than Curzon ever saw anywhere, had come out to the streets to see the new Viceroy. But they were torpid and silent. The reception which he received displeased him greatly. "The train drew up at the wrong place. The red carpet was the size of a postage stamp. The band did not play God Save the Queen . . . No bands played in the streets . . . In fact it is quite evident that the social and ceremonial entourage of the Viceroy has been allowed to sink to a very low ebb," complained Curzon.<sup>52</sup> An unimpressive Lord Elgin left Calcutta after an uneventful viceroyalty. "The parting given to the Elgins in the streets was," thought Curzon, "decidedly meagre and ungrateful, but it does not appear that he had ever succeeded in touching the hearts of the Calcutta people."<sup>53</sup>

Curzon began well as far as economic grievances of the people were concerned. But he moved in a way typical of him. India was passing through one of the greatest famines in modern history. The British Government was well aware of the 'very heavy mortality and widespread privation and misery over a vast tract of country'.<sup>54</sup> Parliament was given to digest different theories regarding the origin of the famine. While Congress leaders held the Government responsible for the calamity, the Government regarded the Indian monsoons as the prime cause of the famines. Curzon was not worried about the causes. His immediate concern was how best to direct relief measures to save life. And, he appealed to world conscience for help. The Viceroy did not realise that his words would expose the economic evils of the British rule more eloquently than all the Congress resolutions put together. The

51. HC, Mss. Eur. D 510/1, Curzon to Hamilton, 31 December 1898.

52. Ibid, Curzon to Hamilton, 5 January 1899.

53. Ibid, Curzon to Hamilton, 12 January 1899.

54. PP, Commons, Statement of the Secretary of State for India, 8 August 1899.

Conservative Government was put to great embarrassment. A heated parliamentary discussion followed Curzon's appeal. Should the British respond to Curzon's cry for help and subscribe substantial amounts to Indian famine relief?

In July 1900, the House of Commons took into consideration the 'gloomy view of the Viceroy'. His description of the terrible famine of Bombay-Gujarat region appeared to some members as more gloomy than the picture given by the Governor of Bombay. It was apparent that Curzon was deviating from the traditional official policy which underplayed the gravity of famines. To the pro-Indian Members in Commons, Curzon's views appeared more correct. "We have said to the nations of the world," said the hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, "'come and see how Englishmen can govern Orientals', and it seems to me that the miseries of our fellow-subjects in India to-day touch our honour, and are a blot upon the fair name of our Empire. The appeal of the Viceroy has gone throughout the length and breadth of the world; the whole world is therefore looking at us and wondering how we will act, and the strange thing is that this House has not yet granted even a £5 note towards the Famine Relief Fund. If the noble Lord (the Secretary of State for India) is obdurate, and this proposal (for help) is cast aside, it may be that we shall have to record that the greatest famine of the nineteenth century was allowed to eat its way through the country without any help being given to the people from the legislative assembly of the greatest and richest Empire the world has ever seen."<sup>55</sup> The proposal for a Parliamentary free grant was advanced by William Wedderburn in right earnest.\* He told the Commons:

"I would specially invite the attention of the House to the almost despairing appeal made by Lord Curzon to the world's charity . . . This cry for help has been answered from many quarters of the globe, from our own colonies, from the United States, from the Emperor of Germany, even from the mandarins of China, and the Sultan of Turkey. Under these circumstances it does not seem fitting that this Parliament, which

55. PP, Commons, Souttar, Dumfriesshire, 26 July 1900.

\* His Resolution was first proposed on 3 April 1900,

represents the richest community in the world, should stand aloof and refuse a contribution proportioned to the wealth of this country and its responsibility for the welfare of the Indian people.”<sup>56</sup>

Those who deeply felt about famine-stricken humanity pleaded for a generous grant of £5,000,000 to India. The Government was in a dilemma. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, M. Hicks Beach, pleaded inability to provide for such a sanction on the plea—“Is it to be provided by increased taxation in this country?”<sup>57</sup> To him, it would be a most dangerous precedent.

But the Indian sympathisers continued to argue. “Are not the resources of every taxpayer in England one hundred fold

56. PP, Commons, William Wedderburn, 26 July 1900. Wedderburn read out an extract from the description of Vaughan Nash, the special correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, about the condition of the Indian people—

“When I look back on the scenes through which I have passed and think of the sum total of human misery, and the despair I have seen on people’s faces, and the ruin this famine has brought on their homes and fields and on their families, I feel it is hopeless to attempt to put into words the agony of India. You see these simple childlike races, devoted to their homes and their children, made outcasts by the famine and forced to abandon their customs and leave their homes to get a little bread by labour at stone-breaking or earth-carrying. Most poignant of all in the appeal it made to me was the silence and submission with which they bear their trials. In the hospital sheds, where you pick your way between the rows of dying, or out in the burning sun, where mothers are hammering stones with one hand and hugging a child with the other, you rarely hear a complaint. Even the gift of tears seems to have dried up, except among the children, whom you see crying sometimes by the side of a sick mother. Those who know India may be able to tell you what spirit it is that looks out from the eyes of these miseries, broken and quenched as they are, and which keeps them dignified and composed in surroundings that are degrading and horrifying. It seemed to me to be the spirit of a noble people, who had won refinement and discipline when our own forefathers were savages, and people we may well be glad to succour and proud to rule, looking out at the wreck of all things, seeing their gods, their homes, their country shrivelling to dust and ashes.”

57. PP, Commons, M. Hicks Beach, 26 July 1900.

greater than those of the Indian peasant," asked Maclean, and proceeded to say: "In this country taxation is scarcely felt by anybody, and it is a very light pressure upon the country. The taxes here are mainly paid by the wealthy, and they are hardly felt by the poorest in our midst. But every poor man in India pays his share of taxation, and feels the pressure of it very acutely indeed . . . Why has Lord Curzon had to scour the world in the hope of getting charity from all the nations of the earth instead of coming to Her Majesty's Government at home, from whom he might have got fifty times as much as all the foreign countries were subscribing in charity for the benefit of India? Is it not that he has had a hint from the Government that it is not desirable, and that it is not considered appropriate that they should be pressed to give a large grant to India at the present moment."<sup>58</sup>

Parliament was aware that during the last forty years of the nineteenth century there had occurred ten famines in India of which the last was the worst, taking a toll of nearly three million lives. The unusual severity of the last famine demanded extraordinary measures including Britain's generosity as a part of world-wide response to provide relief. But it surprised the friends of India that instead of giving money to India, the British Government was about to accept a large gift of money from the Maharaja of Gwalior in order to set up a hospital for the benefit of British soldiers and sailors engaged in the Chinese War. As one Member put it:

"I should say that when the Imperial Government received an offer of that sort—which seems to me to be only another illustration of that spurious Imperialism which is spreading like a parasite over the whole British Empire—at a time when India is suffering the terrible ravages of famine; when they received an offer of nearly £200,000 from an Indian prince, they would have had the politeness to refuse such an offer and tell that native prince that he could better employ his money by giving it to his own starving fellow countrymen at home."<sup>59</sup>

Joseph Walton, Member for Yorkshire, Barnsley, who

58. PP, Commons, Maclean, 26 July 1900.

59. Ibid.

had travelled through the famine-stricken districts, gave an eye witness account of the terrible suffering of the population while appealing for a special grant of £5,000,000 from the Imperial Exchequer. Lord Welby's Commission had previously acknowledged that more than a quarter of a million was annually being overpaid to the Exchequer of England from India, in connection with the financial arrangements between the two countries. The Commission had recommended that it should be put to an end. Joseph Walton pleaded that that policy should be given effect to retrospectively. The aforesaid sum of money had been exacted from the people of India for more than twenty years, amounting to £5,000,000. That amount, therefore, could be returned to India as a gift for famine relief, while Britain could yet enjoy the benefit of the whole of the interest derived from that money.<sup>60</sup>

Even Mancherjee Bhownaggee, conspicuous in Parliament for his anti-Congress and pro-Government declarations, appealed to the conscience of the Cabinet for a considerate policy in a moment of dire distress of the Indian people. "I only appeal," he said, "to the benevolence of the British nation, and to the high Imperial instincts which have recently been shown by the nation in various ways, so that India may feel that her relationship with England is not merely one of pounds, shillings and pence, but that England will stand by India to-day as India has stood by England whenever called upon to do so. I remember during the time of the American War, when there was a great crisis in the Manchester cotton trade, how the merchant princes of Bombay sent stupendous aid to Lancashire . . . I would not hark back on the past, or I might be tempted to dwell on the various instances in which the Indian Exchequer was unjustifiably burdened with large payments on account of the Persian and Abyssinian expeditions, the entertainment of the Sultan, the demonstration at Malta, and the Egyptian campaigns. I only plead for a generous grant in this time of India's need, on the ground that it would be essentially the sort of charity that covereth a multitude of sins."<sup>61</sup>

60. PP, Commons, Joseph Walton, 26 July 1900.

61. PP, Commons, Mancherjee Bhownaggee, 26 July 1900.

No amount of pleading could move the Government of Britain to extend a gesture of goodness. A.J. Balfour, as the First Lord of Treasury, persisted in affirming that the financial responsibility for the various portions of the empire rested primarily upon those portions of the empire, and that, in particular, the financial responsibilities of India were Indian responsibilities and not British responsibilities. "We admit," declared Balfour, "and I would take leave to ask the House to affirm, that in cases where Indian resources are not equal to Indian needs this House may well be asked to come to its assistance. But at the same time we also ask the House to affirm that, until these needs do become greater than Indian resources can bear, it is not only not true charity, it is not only not sound policy, but it is absolutely suicidal for us to endeavour—in a mood of sentiment with which everybody must sympathise, in response to motives which everybody must feel, to relieve sufferings that go to the heart of every feeling man—to prematurely and unnecessarily burden the already heavily-burdened finances of this country."<sup>62</sup>

Before the House of Commons voted on the subject, a grim report, received from India just that very evening, was read out by Samuel Smith. It said:

"This famine is, perhaps, the most fearful calamity that has ever visited this earth. The worst is to come. The most reasonable estimates are that from 18,000,000 to 20,000,000 will perish in this dearth now spreading over the whole Peninsula. Nothing of the kind has appealed to the hearts of Christian people as the death cry of these starving millions."<sup>63</sup>

When the House was divided, 112 Members voted in support of the Government rejecting the proposal for help. This number included A.J. Balfour, John Brodrick, Austen Chamberlain and Lord George Hamilton. Those who voted for providing help numbered 65 and included Asquith, Henry Fowler and William Wedderburn. Somebody had remarked just before the question was put: "I regard this help to India

62. PP, Commons, A.J. Balfour, 26 July 1900.

63. PP, Commons, Samuel Smith, 26 July 1900. The Report was sent from Poonch, dated 6 July 1900.



as part of our Imperial obligations, and those who vote against the motion will be the true Little Englanders.”<sup>64</sup>

The day after that famous debate in Parliament, the Secretary of State, George Hamilton informed Curzon about his displeasure about the whole matter. “After having been connected with two famines,” he said, “the conclusion I came to is that the appeal we make to the outside world is a mistake. It creates universally the impression that the task we have in hand has got altogether beyond our means; and consequently the House of Commons, with some logic, contends that, if any effective response is made to such an appeal, it should be by the Imperial Government.”<sup>65</sup> Hamilton was angry at the abusive and violent words used by some Members of Parliament in course of the debate and he tried to convey his impression to the Viceroy that India was not at the end of her resources, and that the British exchequer had no money, and that the English taxpayer at that moment was too heavily burdened to accept any further taxation. When Curzon did not agree with such arguments, Hamilton silenced him by saying, “I am afraid we differ as regards the desirability of Imperial help. I can understand your desire to establish and connect that sympathy and gratitude between the two countries which is the foundation of all sound political connection; but I cannot help looking at this matter from the financial point of view.”<sup>66</sup>

The National Congress was aware of the indifference of the British Parliament at that grave hour of distress. When the Congress met in its sixteenth session at Lahore in December 1900, it resolved that “this Congress desires to record its gratitude to H.E. the Viceroy for the benevolence of his famine policy.”<sup>67</sup> But in another Resolution it discussed the necessity of independent enquiry into the economic condition of the people of India.<sup>68</sup> And, Bal Gangadhar Tilak

64. PP, Commons, Maddison, 26 July 1900.

65. HC, Mss. Eur. C 126/2, Hamilton to Curzon, 27 July 1900.

66. Ibid, Hamilton to Curzon, 3 August 1900.

67. INC, Resolution VII, 1900.

68. INC, Resolution II, 1900.

declared: "The Government does not think that the cause of people's misery lies in itself, but believes that it lies somewhere outside. It wants to throw the responsibility upon others. What we want is that the responsibility should be shifted."<sup>69</sup>

Before the Congress had met at Lahore, Hamilton reminded Wedderburn that the Congress, as it worked at that time, was bound to fail and bring discredit upon itself. He also pointed out that its representatives in England were composed of the most extreme Radicals, whose ideas on almost every conceivable subject were opposed to the people of India, except in joining a certain section of them in abusing the Government. "I further told him," reported Hamilton to Curzon, "that he had throughout allowed that section of Mahratta Brahmins, who are really hostile to us, and who never lose an opportunity of attacking the foundations of our rule, to have much too great influence in controlling the actions and decisions of the Congress."<sup>70</sup> It is difficult to understand the view of the Secretary of State that the English Radicals worked against the Indian people, but he correctly assessed the rising influence of the Mahratta Brahmins on the politics of India, though of course, he could not think of any way to prevent it.

Congress or no Congress, economic factors were responsible, to a large extent, for the growing Indian hostility towards the British rule. Political situation was also developing fast to encourage agitational methods. In the year 1900, William Wedderburn retired from Parliament. He was like a link between that body and the Indian National Congress. The grievances of the Indian people were voiced by him not out of political considerations but out of genuine sympathy. He understood that, while in office, both the Conservatives and Liberals were of the same brand in matters of imperial policies. He said once: "I think I have said enough to show that the House of Commons cannot depend upon the Secretary of State for India to give a ready hearing to complaints, to make impartial inquiry, and to afford effectual protection to the weak against

69. CC, see *the Sixteenth Congress*, Lahore, 1900.

70. HC, Mss. Eur. C 126/2, Hamilton to Curzon, 24 October 1900.

the strong. Failing him, what other machinery exists in the House of Commons for the redress of Indian grievances? There is the official Opposition, and in all other Departments, the ex-Minister takes the lead in criticising the doings of his successor on the Treasury Bench. But this is not the case as regards India. The ex-Minister, during his term of office, has become so thoroughly saturated with the spirit and traditions of the India Office that he cannot emancipate himself when he crosses to the Opposition side; so that when Indian complaints are under debate he seldom comes forward, and when he does, it is generally to exchange compliments with his successor in office, and denounce the independent Member who has brought the grievance."<sup>71</sup>

India in fact required neither an official Tory nor an official Whig to speak on her behalf, but an independent minded man who could criticise any party in power. Wedderburn fought hard this uphill battle. Public opinion in England was against him. Press was hostile to him. His friends were few. What pained him most was the general apathy of the House of Commons to burning issues of India. The House was generally empty when India was discussed. At times, the speeches of the pro-Indian members were listened to without any interest. The apathy of Parliament evoked ridicule from the Press as if the 'ancient tale of woe' of the Indian peasant was a suitable topic for light-hearted treatment. Wedderburn's presence in Parliament was a source of great strength to National Congress. His departure from that House harmed not the cause of the Congress as much as it harmed the constitutional relation between the two countries.

The end of the nineteenth century marked the end of an epoch in Indian history. With the death of Queen Victoria in 1901, the old oriental concepts of monarchical values also vanished to a very large extent. Curzon informed the Secretary of State Hamilton: "No successor to the Queen, however genial, tactful, and popular, . . . can ever win from the Indian peoples the feeling of personal devotion which, assisted by her great longevity and the glory of her

71. PP, Commons, William Wedderburn, 8 August 1899.

reign, Queen Victoria aroused.”<sup>72</sup> The National Congress paid its tribute: “The Queen Empress is no more . . . In every part of the country memorials are being raised which are destined, like those ancient monoliths of the great Asoka of happy memory, to perpetuate her name so long as the sun and moon endure.”<sup>73</sup> And thereafter, it went on to discuss the conduct of the British rulers in reference to the chronic starvation of the people, their abject ignorance, grim and silent suffering, and the rest.

The advent of the twentieth century saw the beginning of an organised political agitation in India. The good services of Curzon apart, his personal conduct as also his bitter hatred towards the Congress hastened anti-Government movements. Indian consciousness and Curzonian imperialism could not coalesce. George Hamilton correctly assessed: “The Englishman they want as Viceroy is a sentimental radical, who is full of wishy-washy ideas as to the equalization and fraternization of all races, and who would act upon that idea in India.”<sup>74</sup> Though the new India wanted a friendly Viceroy which Curzon was not, there could yet be scope for reciprocal understanding. From the side of the Congress, they showed from the beginning an appreciation of Curzon’s famine policy, police reform and creation of Cadet Corps, etc. But on his side, Curzon began to alienate the Congress right from the start. Early in his rule, in November 1900, he confided to Hamilton: “My own belief is that the Congress is tottering to its fall, and one of my greatest ambitions while in India is to assist it to a peaceful demise.”<sup>75</sup> It is quite surprising that to some quarters the Congress appeared to be a dying body while in reality it was growing rapidly. When *The Times* declared in 1898 that the Congress movement was on the wane, the Congress challenged it to send its people to come and witness that ‘great, majestic assembly, representing the wisdom, the

72. HC, Curzon to Hamilton, Vol. XIX, 24 January 1901.

73. INC, Tribute paid by the President Dinshaw E. Wacha at the Seventeenth Congress in Calcutta, December 1901.

74. HC, Hamilton to Curzon, Vol. V, 26 August 1903.

75. HC, Curzon to Hamilton, Vol. XVIII, 18 November 1900.

intelligence, and the capacity of educated India'.<sup>76</sup> That Curzon hoped for its approaching death remained unknown to the Congress, but the latter could quickly realise that the Viceroy did not want any dealings with it. The estrangement developed as a consequence of Curzon's attitude.

What the Viceroy disliked was the composition of the Congress as it was emerging during his regime. In his opinion, it had no right to pose as the representative of the people. At its best, it represented only a small section of the community. Curzon was harping upon the same old thesis of Dufferin though several years had passed since. Curzon also wrongly imagined that those who constituted the Congress did not have optimism for the future. "My belief is," he wrote in November 1900, "that the best men in the Congress are more and more seeing the hopelessness of their cause, and indeed many of their papers have begun to argue that they had better trust me to give them as much as I can instead of wasting their energies in clamouring for what no Viceroy is likely to give them at all."<sup>77</sup> Curzon had overestimated his own popularity and underestimated that of the Congress, and side by side, had over-simplified the Government-Congress relations.

At the other end, in London, the Conservative Government, well established in power after the death of Gladstone, felt more and more annoyed at what a few pro-Congress persons were doing to discredit the Government. It was the economic issue which they had taken up boldly. William Digby had written and circulated a book titled 'Prosperous British India' which caused a stir and sensation in some quarters. To Hamilton, "Digby repeats and reiterates for nearly 600 pages the same series of falsehoods, supported by cooked calculations." The Government feared that those who knew nothing about British India would come to conclude from reading that book that there had been a steady and steep deterioration in the material conditions of the people during the last few years.<sup>78</sup> The poverty of India was being discussed in the Fabian Society.

76. CC, see *the Fourteenth Congress*, December 1898.

77. HC, Mss. Eur. D 510/6, Curzon to Hamilton, 18 November 1900.

78. HC, Mss. Eur. C 126/4, Hamilton to Curzon, 23 January 1902.

In Parliament, the theme of poverty was the main concern of the pro-Congress Members. It was getting difficult for the Secretary of State to reply to the charges, which according to him, were 'crammed with the old familiar quotations, and supported by a mass of distorted figures'. "That ruffian, Digby," wrote an angry Hamilton to Curzon, "who wrote such insolent letters to you, has been bombarding me with similar epistles. I took the trouble of analysing one or two of his main statements upon which he based the greater part of his allegations, and I found that they were statistical frauds of the most barefaced character. If allusion had been made to him as an authority, I was ready to fall upon him; but I thought it was better to leave him alone, as I have absolutely taken no notice of him in his repeated challenges to try and entice me into a controversial correspondence."<sup>79</sup> The Cabinet, in the face of economic problems, was mainly on the defensive. By middle of 1902 Lord Salisbury, the first great Conservative Prime Minister who resisted the Congress ideas, retired from Premiership. His successor, Balfour, could not fight his critics as hard as Salisbury did.

Some of the financial measures of the Conservatives provided more ammunition to the pro-Congress people to fight their battle. Queen Victoria was dead. The accession of the new monarch called for the holding of a grand Durbar in India. The expenditure was indeed going to be large. But, to the Cabinet and the Viceroy, a ceremony of that type was necessary to give effect "to a sense of common union, and common fealty to the King, and the ceremonies and pageants, by which expression is given to this idea, are in accord with instincts and traditions of India."<sup>80</sup> To the pro-Indian veterans, on the other hand, it was an occasion to attack the imperial policy of reckless expenditure. "I suppose," regretted the Secretary of State, "there has been no Secretary of State who has held his office, who was more friendly towards the Natives or more disposed to help them in their legitimate aspirations than I am, yet, because I cannot accept the ridiculous creed

79. HC, Mss. Eur. C 126/4, Hamilton to Curzon, 6 February 1902.

80. Ibid, Hamilton to Curzon, 11 September 1902,

of Naoroji and the Mahratta Brahmin, or acquiesce in the crude and unworkable suggestions that are made to me by the representatives of the Indian Congress in Parliament, ever since I have been in office I have been represented as scorning and detesting the Native population, and actuated by one idea only—to put every burden I can upon Indian revenues.”<sup>81</sup> While the Secretary of State was becoming the target of harsh criticism in England, the egoistic Viceroy was coming under serious charges in India as his Viceroyalty progressed.

Towards the end of 1902, a Member in Commons expressed the hope: “It would be a God-send to the people of India if Lord Curzon’s stay were prolonged for five years beyond the ordinary term. His Lordship had done magnificent work in India.”<sup>82</sup> But much before the term expired, when Curzon was away in England during the summer of 1904, the officiating Governor-General Lord Ampthill reported home: “The Native Press and a section of the English Press continue to abuse Lord Curzon in a monstrously unfair and spiteful manner, and there are now hardly any of these newspapers which do not express a hope that he will not return to India. They thank him in a perfunctory manner for having got the Salt Tax reduced and for having maintained an impartial attitude in the matter of ‘collisions’ between Europeans and Natives, but when this is done they consider themselves at liberty to assail him with the pettiest sarcasm and vilest abuse. It pains and disheartens me very much to see all this, for few men have deserved better of India than Lord Curzon.”<sup>83</sup>

Two acts of Curzon displeased the Congress greatly. At a time of critical economic situation, he dazzled India by the coronation ceremony of Victoria’s successor. Secondly, at a time of growing political activism of university graduates, he introduced educational reforms ostensibly to tone up the administrative and academic aspects of higher education, but purposefully also to restrict the spread of higher education.

81. HC, Mss. Eur. C 126/4, Hamilton to Curzon, 1 October 1902.

82. PP, Commons, Weir, 21 November 1902.

83. Ampthill Collections, Ampthill to Brodrick, 25 May 1904,

In both of his measures, he found in the Congress his outspoken critics.

The Viceroy gave an assurance that the cost of the Durbar ceremony 'will be immeasurably less than the dimensions which a too tropical imagination has allowed it to assume'. The Congress, while meeting in Ahmedabad shortly before the Durbar assembled in Delhi, pointed out: "The Durbar has been the subject of animated controversy both here and in England. It has been fiercely assailed by critics whose utterances are entitled to respectful attention. One of them has described it as 'an act of uncalled for extravagance', specially out of place at a time when the country is just emerging from the throes of a great famine."<sup>84</sup> For the first time in the history of India's relations with Britain, a King of England was being crowned as the Emperor of Hindustan. Was there a spontaneous and genuine response from the side of the Indian people towards such an occasion which pleased the Englishmen so much? That was the issue for consideration.

The Secretary of State regarded the Durbar as a stupendous undertaking, and on a scale of dimensions embracing such a variety of potentialities and forces as had never before been attempted even in the palmy days of the Roman Empire. "It is a rare achievement," he congratulated the Viceroy, "unique in many respects, and you have, as its creator and superintendent, every reason to be proud of your task."<sup>85</sup> Lord Curzon's speech on the occasion showed his unlimited faith in the power of the British Government to solve all the existing and further difficulties of the empire in matters of race, religion, labour, and self-sustenance. He inflicted on his listeners advice and admonitions. He wanted the Government to remain unfettered in managing the affairs of India. He showed unbounded confidence in the stability of the empire. But all were not as optimistic as the Viceroy. "I wish," wrote Hamilton, "I had, so far as India and British rule are concerned, your belief in the future: the longer I am here, the more pessimistic I become as regards, not the immediate, but

84. BML, 8023 aa 45, INC, Address of Surendranath Bannerjee, Ahmedabad, 1902.

85. HC, Mss. Eur. C 126/5, Hamilton to Curzon, 6 January 1903.



the far future: there are forces at work, such as education, a free Press, selection by competitive examination for public service, civil courts, and the increasing power of the money-lenders, which are undermining and reversing the old order of things upon which our rule rests, and substituting a shifting and unstable quagmire of sham Radicalism and anti-English feeling such as can support no great system of alien and autocratic Government.”<sup>86</sup>

The Indian Press took a critical view of the Durbar extravagance. The coronation Durbar was described as the ‘Curzonation’ Durbar. Much of the Press comments was described as ‘spiteful’. It was a pity that the Indian Press derived a large part of their information in those matters from England, and particularly ‘from that pernicious little rag *India*’. *India* was edited and written by men holding extreme radical views. It was suspected that almost all the regular writers on the staff of *India* were also on the staff of the *Star* and the *Leader*. With inspiration from English Radicals, the Indian Press denounced the Durbar as thoroughly as it could.

The Viceroy took the criticism in extreme bitterness. “One criticism, very human, but very mean,” he said, “is that I am getting up all this *tamasha* for the honour and glory to myself.”<sup>87</sup>

86. HC, Mss. Eur. C 126/5, Hamilton to Curzon, 6 January 1903.

87. HC, Mss. Eur. D 510/11, D 510/12, Note on Delhi Durbar. Some of the Press Comments on Proclamation Durbar:

*The Madras Times*, 1 January 1903—“Lord Curzon rose to the fullest conception of the great task with which his King had entrusted him . . . India is, however, a vast country, and to a degree vague and cloudy in their aspirations and views, and much given to indulging in dreams. It would not be surprising therefore if, in parts of the Indian Empire, at least, the Viceroy’s speech and the King’s message, kindly and full of promises as they are, should be received with a sense of disappointment.”

*The Hindu*, 2 January 1903—“It has been customary in this country and we believe it is customary in every country under the sun, ‘to mark the accession of Kings and Emperors to their throne with concessions and rewards to the people . . . Nothing has been done, nothing has been promised, for which a whole people will feel

On 17 February 1903, the new King-Emperor read out to Parliament the following message:

"My succession to the Imperial Crown of India has been proclaimed and celebrated in an assembly of unexampled splendour at Delhi. I there received from the feudatory Princes and Chiefs, and from all classes of the peoples within My Indian dominions, gratifying marks of their loyalty and devotion to My Throne and family. I am glad to be able to state that this imposing ceremony has coincided, in point of

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grateful, or whereby their position or status will be improved. The people of India, in their present condition, value nothing more than the elevation of their political status."

*Amrit Bazar Patrika*, 3 January 1903—"The Viceroy's speech . . . was otherwise full of the usual platitudes, such as 'India is the brightest jewel in a diadem of England' . . . In every civilised country, scarcely a year passes without adding to its prosperity. In India the case is different. Here not a year closes upon us without its horrors more or less. Take the average of the last five years. Can you show one incident during that period which can clear the heart? It is a tale of the three scourges, which have excited the fear of mankind from the beginning of the world, namely, famine, pestilence and war."

*The Bengalee*, 4 January 1903—"All this effort has been spent, all this expense has been incurred, so that His Excellency Lord Curzon of Kedleston might tell the Princes and the people of India that the troops composing the Indian army, both European and Indian, are good and efficient soldiers, that the officers of that army are brave and capable leaders, that the civilians who administer the civil affairs of the Empire are able and honest and industrious, that the Princes and the peoples of India are very loyal to His Majesty the Emperor, that the British rule of India on the lines on which it has all along been carried is exceedingly good, and that there can be no prosperity in India without its necessary adjunct—British rule. All these are facts very well known to the Princes and the people of India. His Excellency is a western statesman and is well aware of the principle enunciated by the great Talleyrand that language was given to men not for the purpose of expressing but for the purpose of concealing his thoughts."

- *The Indian Nation*, 5 January 1903—"The imperial *tamasha* is in full swing at Delhi . . . It was adequately representative of the wealth, the rank, the official power and dignity of the land. But it is not every mind that is overcome by the fascination of dress and deco-

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time, with the disappearance of drought and agricultural distress in Western India, and that the prospects both of agriculture and commerce throughout My Indian Empire are more encouraging and satisfactory than they have been for some years past.”<sup>88</sup>

Within two days, the progressives demanded a statement from the Government regarding the cost of the Delhi Durbar. Lord George Hamilton replied: “The Budget Estimates for the present financial year included £260,000 for the cost of the Delhi Durbar.”<sup>89</sup> In India the discussion centred on the question whether it should have been held at all ‘against the almost unanimous protests of all our public and representative men both in the press and on the platform’. “On what ground did they protest?” asked the Congress President Lal Mohan Ghose. “They protested not because they were wanting in loyalty to the Sovereign whose coronation it was intended to celebrate, but because they felt that if His Majesty’s Ministers had done their duty and had laid before him an unvarnished story of his famine-stricken subjects in India, His Majesty, with his characteristic sympathy for suffering humanity, would himself have been the first to forbid his representatives in

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ration, and if many were elated by the majesty of the show and felt that they had not lived and spent in vain, others must have distrustfully asked ‘if this be joy?’ ”

Lord Curzon himself described the Durbar thus:

“We had on successive days or nights—(1) the State Entry, with a procession, military, elephants, and horseback, over three miles long; (2) opening of arts exhibition with three thousand people; (3) Durbar—13,000 people in the arena (Lord Lytton had 4,000) and probably over a quarter of a million of people on the ground; (4) Fire-works with all Delhi in the streets . . . (9) Indian Army Review—nearly 40,000 troops; (10) Evening Party to Native Chiefs—600 persons . . .

From another point of view the Durbar, or rather any speech at it, was a failure. This is the Native Paper point of view. You will see one strain running through it from Peshawar to Tuticorin—disappointment.”

HC, Mss. Eur. D 510/13, Curzon to Hamilton, 13 January 1903.

88. PP, Lords, His Majesty’s Speech, 17 February 1903.

89. PP, Commons, George Hamilton, 19 February 1903,

this country to offer a pompous pageant to a starving population.”<sup>90</sup>

As regards Curzon's education policy, the National Congress was of opinion that the intention of the Viceroy was not as much to improve education as to control it. A resolution said: “That this Congress, while welcoming any wisely considered scheme for the reform of the educational policy of Government is of opinion that the Universities Bill, if passed into law, will have, as recommended in the Report of the Universities Commission, the effect of restricting the area of education and completely destroying the independence of the Universities upon which largely depend their efficiency and usefulness, and of turning them practically into departments of Government.”<sup>91</sup>

The frontier policies of Curzon were equally disquieting to Indian leaders. Surprisingly enough, a number of Liberal Members in the House of Commons shared the Congress misapprehensions about aggressive frontier designs of the Viceroy. Even the less aggressive Conservatives could not view with satisfaction Curzon's military adventurism. The Viceroy was taking pride in making such statements as “it was by the loan and prompt dispatch of British troops from India that Natal was saved from being overrun by the Boers at the beginning of the South African Campaign”, and that “it was an Indian General commanding Native troops from India that relieved the legations at Peking, and further, that, in the absence of our European troops elsewhere”.<sup>92</sup> Shortly before his death, W.S. Caine, one of the distinguished friends of India in the House of Commons, requested the House to consider how unwise it was to use troops of the Indian army in other parts of the world in which India had no direct or substantial interest.<sup>93</sup> He presented statistics before the Commons that the Indian Army consisted, roughly, of 75,000 British troops, 150,000 Indian troops, 20,000 Indian Reserves, 30,000 volunteers, and 16,000 Imperial Service Corps, or a total of 290,000

90. INC, Presidential Address at the Madras Session, December 1903.

91. INC, Resolution V, 1903.

92. Lord Curzon's Speech at the Council, 1902.

93. PP, Commons, W.S. Caine, 26 February 1903.

men at a cost of £15,000,000 to India or £52 per head. "Not only is the Indian Army the costliest in the world," said Caine, "but it is imposed on the poorest nation in the world. It costs 75 per cent more per soldier than the British Army; it is four times dearer than the French Army; five times dearer than the Russian Army; six times dearer than the German Army; seven times dearer than the Austrian or Turkish Army; and twenty-four times dearer than the Swiss Army."<sup>94</sup> Yet the military burden on India continued to increase. Lord Curzon himself is said to have placed the average wealth of India at £1 6s 8d, or less than one penny per day per head of the population. Yet he indulged in military dreams forgetting the people's plight, and the British Government was all too willing to charge India with extra cost. Caine produced the following resolution of the National Congress for the information of the Commons:

"That this Congress enters its most emphatic protest against the fresh permanent burden of £786,000 per annum which the increase made during the course of the year in the pay of the British soldier would impose on the revenues of India, and views with alarm the recent announcement of the Secretary of State for India hinting at a possible increase in the near future of the strength of the British troops in the country. In view of the fact that during the last three years large bodies of British troops have, with perfect safety, been withdrawn for service in South Africa and China, the proposal to increase the strength of the British garrison manifestly involves a grievous injustice to the Indian taxpayer, and the Congress earnestly trusts that the proposal will either be abandoned or else be carried out at the cost of the British Exchequer, who in fairness should bear, not only the cost of any additional British troops that may be employed, but also a reasonable proportion of the existing garrison."<sup>95</sup>

The British argument against the Congress grievances ran on the same old lines that the army ensured safety and

94. PP, Commons, W.S. Caine, 26 February 1903.

95. PP, Commons, see proceedings of the House of Commons, Military Expenditure of the Indian Empire, 26 February 1903.

security unknown in Indian history. "It is frequently assumed by native opinion in India," asserted Lord George Hamilton, "that India, in consequence of being an integral portion of the British Empire, is subject both to extra risk of taxation from which she would be free if she were a separate and self-supporting political entity. But this theory will not stand a moment's examination, and it is an entire delusion. From time immemorial, as history goes back, India has been invaded from the central plains of Asia until British rule, founded upon a sea base and upon naval supremacy at sea, established itself in the South of India and gradually rolled back what, upto that time, had been the ever-recurring tide of northern aggression. For a century or more India has been immune from the old terror of invasion and spoliation. She has had that protection because she is part of the British Empire. But the protection so afforded her has vitally affected our whole military system, for it has brought us, who are primarily a naval power, to the boundaries and territories of the greatest military empire in the world. It is this contiguity which affects our military establishments and expenditure."<sup>96</sup>

While the fear of Russia led to an expansion of military establishments in India, Lord Curzon decided to initiate steps to strengthen India's hold over territories beyond the Himalayan frontiers. Curzon nursed his own ambitions. From the viceregal throne he found it tempting to seek glory and a place in history. In his political design he wanted to move alone and pick his way through all obstacles. He was not the man to be restrained either by Indian or by British public opinion. More than anything else was his attitude of defiance of his superior authorities. Lord George Hamilton, the Secretary of State, who was full of praise for Curzon most of the time, did not know that the Viceroy was prepared to go beyond his control whenever he deemed necessary. The 'indomitable energy' of Curzon which, according to Hamilton, brought great changes in the spheres of education, police, land revenue, railways, irrigation, and famine administration, was also operating in the field of foreign affairs. To that 'indomitable

96. PP, Commons, George Hamilton, 13 August 1903.

energy' Hamilton himself fell a victim. Curzon began his Tibetan adventure disregarding the wishes of his own superiors. He perturbed the British Government more than he perturbed the National Congress. Early in 1904, the Marquis of Ripon gave an account of the Tibetan episode in the House of Lords which revealed the inner story of the development. It is worthwhile reproducing the speech at some length for a better understanding of Curzon's role. Ripon said in the Lords on 26 February 1904:

"Perhaps I may be permitted to say that throughout the whole of the Government of Lord Curzon this is the first occasion, either in Parliament or out of it, upon which I have ever said a word of criticism of his Government. It is not a pleasant task for one who has been Viceroy of India to indulge in criticism of a successor. I had believed that Lord Curzon, if he ever held, as I think he once did, what are called the doctrines of the forward policy in India, learnt very soon after he became Viceroy how unwise and how dangerous that policy was, and had decided to proceed upon much sounder principles, but, unfortunately, this Blue-book shows us that that was a mistake in regard to Lord Curzon's intention, and that if he did not pursue the forward policy in Afghanistan he was unfortunately all along endeavouring to pursue that policy towards the frontier of Tibet. There is the most remarkable similarity between the various efforts of the friends of the forward policy in the past and the views which have been expressed by Lord Curzon in regard to Tibet. Every step in that policy has been inspired by a Russian scare. The first fatal Afghan war began on those grounds and terminated as unhappily, we all know very well. In the case of the first Afghan War there was a live Russian agent. He was disavowed by his Government and put an end to his own life. On the second occasion, too, there was also a live Russian agent. But we have now nothing more than rumours of a Russian agent. There is no proof in these Papers that any Russian agent has been to Lhasa. A certain deputation went to St. Petersburg, but I do not think it can be maintained that that deputation was sent with the authority of the Government of Lhasa . . .

"I think we owe much gratitude to Lord George Hamilton

for the manner in which he steadily resisted the proposals for advance which came from the Government of India. He fought a long and a firm battle. At the last moment, under circumstances, no doubt, of considerable difficulty, he did give a certain kind of consent to a portion of Lord Curzon's proposals, though not, I think, to his general policy in regard to this question. I know, of course, that it is very difficult for a Secretary of State for India to resist perpetually and continually the pressure and the demands of the Government of India . . .

“What you have to look at in this case and in all these cases is, that once you embark on this forward policy you are pushed on step by step. Colonel Younghusband goes forward; he occupies the Chumbi Valley; he presses for advance, and step by step you are brought to a position in which I quite admit resistance is very difficult. Lord George Hamilton, after he had sent that last telegram, retired from office. I am not going to make any hostile criticism in regard to Mr. Brodrick's (Hamilton's successor in office) proceedings; but I am sorry to see that he has gone further than Lord George Hamilton even in his last telegram. Mr. Brodrick shows, by his telegrams, that he desires to restrain Lord Curzon from his proposed advance as much as possible, and in that respect he is right. But the difficulty is that when you have got a considerable way into Tibetan country it becomes exceedingly difficult, unless special circumstances should arise, to call a halt, and to go back . . . It would be insane to attempt to stretch the frontiers of India in that direction. To the north-east of India you have a great mountain barrier. Keep behind that barrier; do not attempt to go beyond it, and you will be safe. No one will invade you over those mountains, and India is quite large enough without any further extension of her frontier.”<sup>97</sup>

Curzon forced the Conservative Cabinet to a situation from which there was no escape. The new Secretary of State, Brodrick, appealed to the Commons for sanction to defray the expenses of military operations “which may become necessary beyond the frontiers of His Majesty's Indian possessions for



the purpose of protecting the political mission which has been despatched to the Tibetan Government" from the revenues of India.<sup>98</sup> The House had no objection to spending money in Tibet from Indian exchequer. That was a matter for the Congress to complain. What disturbed many people in Parliament was the attitude which Curzon had adopted. The Leader of the Opposition, Henry Campbell-Bannerman, wanted to know "which is the stronger of the two, which is the more powerful magnet—the Government of the King in this country or Lord Curzon and his Government in India."<sup>99</sup> The Prime Minister, A.J. Balfour, had no alternative but to defend the Tibetan adventure as an imperial need of considerable importance. He announced:

"I admit everything that has been said as to the impossibility of invading India by way of Tibet. I believe such a military project is intrinsically absurd, and that any Power which has the strength to invade India would find much easier routes for doing so than over the snow-clad 'Roof of the World'. But that does not alter the fact that though no army is likely to penetrate our northern frontier from Tibet, it would be a serious misfortune to the Indian Government, and a danger to our northern frontier, should Tibet fall under any European influence other than our own."<sup>100</sup>

Balfour had also to praise Curzon generously to counter the Opposition criticism of the Viceroy's conduct. "We do not want to add any further responsibilities to the difficulties which are constantly weighing upon the statesmen who have in their charge the destinies of our Eastern Empire. Among those statesmen there is no name which I think will shine out in history with more lustre than that of the present Viceroy of India," declared the Prime Minister.<sup>101</sup> Attempts were made to depict Colonel Younghusband as the villain of the Tibetan drama, but few people really felt convinced of Curzon's innocence. As Gibson Bowles pointed out, "There was no doubt that it was with Lord Curzon's knowledge and acquies-

98. PP, Commons, Brodrick, 13 April 1904.

99. Ibid, H. Campbell-Bannerman, 13 April 1904.

100. Ibid, A.J. Balfour, 13 April 1904.

101. Ibid.

cence that this 'defiance' of the authority of the Home Government by Colonel Younghusband had been carried on, and the attempt made to force down their throats a treaty, convention, or arrangement known to be contrary to their policy; and . . . that the hard words 'defiance', 'disobedience', and 'disregard of authority', might more properly have been applied to the Viceroy than to the able and gallant officer who conducted the expedition."<sup>102</sup>

The concern of the Indian National Congress was not over the personal ambition of Curzon to conquer 'the incarnate Buddha' (Dalai Lama), as some of his critics thought, but over the financial involvement which the Tibetan adventure necessitated. "Never before," declared Gopal Krishna Gokhale, "and I make the statement after due deliberation—was the financial position of the country so disquieting as now. This plethora of money at the disposal of the Government makes an irresponsible administration still more irresponsible. It enables the Viceroy to dispense in the style of a great Oriental ruler, special aids to Local Governments, out of his own abundance, as acts of grace, to send expeditions under the name of Political Missions into the territories of helpless farmers and priests, to undertake large schemes of Army reorganisation and to listen to 'the conceivings of his vast designs' to play a great role in the heart of Central Asia."<sup>103</sup> The National Congress, meeting at its twentieth session in Bombay in December 1904, passed the following resolution:

"That this Congress expresses its profound regret that in the case of the recent Tibetan Expedition the object of the Act of 1858, in providing that India's revenue shall not be spent outside the statutory limits of India, except to repel foreign aggression, without the previous sanction of Parliament, was frustrated in practice by the Government continuing to describe the Expedition as a 'Political Mission', till it was no longer possible for Parliament to withhold its sanction to the required expenditure, and that Indian revenue were thus unjustifiably deprived of the protection constitutionally secured

102. PP, Commons, Gibson Bowles, 14 February 1905.

103. INC, Gokhale's speech at the Twentieth Congress, Bombay, December 1904.

to them.”<sup>104</sup>

The Congress further expressed its regret that the House of Commons refused to contribute from the Imperial Exchequer even a portion of the cost of that Expedition, when it was in furtherance of imperial interests. By the time the Congress was deliberating over Tibet, the total expenditure on the so-called Tibet Mission had already gone upto £812,730.<sup>105</sup>

If the Congress felt bitter about Curzon, the Viceroy too was eager to offend that body in whatever manner he could. In December 1904, the Congress met in Bombay with Henry Cotton as its President. An administrator of distinction, Cotton had observed the course of Indian nationalism with pleasure and sympathy. It was his personal conviction that the Congress demands were ‘continually more and more reasonable, and more and more irresistible’. After he laid down his office, Cotton stood as a friend of the Congress and was made its President. To Curzon it was intolerable. He, in fact, intensely disliked Cotton. When in his capacity as the President of the Congress, Cotton prepared to lead a deputation to the Viceroy, the latter declined to receive him and his group. It was a discourteous gesture on the part of the head of the Indian Government towards the head of the nation’s supreme political organisation.

Curzon had his reasons not to see the Congress-walas. They were carrying with them a bundle of resolutions passed at their session. The resolutions dealt with the acute poverty of India due to drain of wealth, decay of indigenous arts and industries, over-assessment of land, excessively costly character of the system of administration, alarming indebtedness of the peasantry, Tibetan expedition, and continuous military burdens, and similar other subjects. What is more, the Congress had also condemned the Viceroy’s crowning internal act in India—the proposal for the partition of Bengal. Lord Curzon was no saint to receive a body of persons and to hear from them a total condemnation of his administration. His refusal to see them, therefore, was natural; though of course,

104. INC, Resolution X, 1904,

105. PP, Commons, see the statement of the Secretary of State for India, 16 February 1905.

it created a storm in political circles. Indian newspapers reported the news with pungent views. And, in the House of Commons, Swift Macneill asked the Secretary of State if the action of the Viceroy had the sanction of the Imperial Government. Brodrick replied: "I have no official information on the subject; but I observe that a letter from the Viceroy's Private Secretary to Sir Henry Cotton, couched in cordial language, stating the reasons why Lord Curzon declined to receive him officially as President of the Congress has been published in the Indian newspapers. As at present advised, I see no reason to question the propriety of the course adopted by the Viceroy."<sup>106</sup>

Lord Curzon came to India with fond hopes of an early Congress demise. But it was during his regime that the Congress assumed greater vigour and grew into its adulthood. At the Bombay Congress of 1904 William Wedderburn was present. He stressed on the necessity of drawing the attention of the British electorate as well as of leaders of great political parties to Indian questions in a more determined manner than ever before. Britain was preparing for a general election. There was a new socio-political consciousness at the beginning of the new century. Wedderburn wanted that Indian leadership should come to a closer contact with the British public since the Indian grievances fell on deaf ears of the Viceroy and his bureaucracy. Deputations from the Congress were sent in 1885 and in 1890. But a more representative delegation was contemplated in 1904. Suggestions were made to select Surendranath Bannerjea to represent Bengal, Krishnan Nair to represent Madras, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Mohammed Ali Jinnah to represent Bombay, Bishen Narayan Dhar, United Provinces, and Lala Lajpat Rai, Punjab. The Congress also thought of a more permanent kind of relation with the British Parliament, and, rather in an ambitious way, it passed the following resolution:

•"That, in the opinion of the Congress, time has arrived when the people of this country should be allowed a larger voice in the administration and control of the affairs of their

106. PP, Commons, Statement of the Secretary of State, 16 February 1905.

country by

(a) The bestowal on each Province or Presidency of India of the franchise to return at least two members to the English House of Commons; . . ."<sup>107</sup>

The intention of the Congress was fast changing too. "New ideas," declared Henry Cotton from his Presidential chair, "are springing up. New aspirations are being called forth. The power of public opinion is growing daily. Such a condition of affairs is one in which the task of Government, and especially of a despotic Government, is beset with difficulties of no light kind. To move too fast is dangerous, but to lag behind is more dangerous still . . . Relax not your efforts, for the waves of progress are irresistibly dashing against the breakwater of prejudice . . . The ideal of an Indian patriot is the establishment of a federation of free and separate States, the United States of India, placed on a fraternal footing with the self-governing colonies, each with its own local autonomy, cemented together under the aegis of Great Britain."<sup>108</sup>

Curzon's rule in India, in the meantime was coming to a close. Those were critical days for India and the Congress. Also, for Curzon himself. In August 1903, George Hamilton had expressed the hope: "The past five years have been years of exceptional activity in India . . . It seemed to us that it would be greatly to India's disadvantage if the Viceroy, who by his personal vigour had himself initiated all these inquiries, left office before he had time to put into shape and to ensure the acceptance and establishment of the reforms and improvements proposed."<sup>109</sup> So Curzon continued. But within one year he was the hero of several major enterprises and the centre of an acute controversy. By the middle of 1905, his conduct was being openly questioned in London itself. In a meeting held in St. James's Hall in May 1905, scathing attacks were made on Lord Curzon's administration. It was said that Curzon had Russianised India. The matter was discussed in Parliament. One of his Conservative supporters tried to please the Liberals by saying, "The noble Lord went out to

107. INC, Resolution IX, 1904.

108. INC, Presidential Address of Henry Cotton, the Twentieth Congress, Bombay, December 1904.

109. PP, Commons, Hamilton, 13 August 1903.

India as a strong Party man, but he had administered India in a thoroughly non-Party spirit, and had thereby carried out the real traditions of Indian Government."<sup>110</sup> Referring to the storm he had already raised in India, the hon. Member said:

"The House knew that there had been a very strong attack on the Viceroy of India for sanctioning what was called the University Policy in India . . . Then, again, there was the famous speech of Lord Curzon about which there was great criticism. Lord Curzon used that expression, which he himself would not have used, about the standards of morality in India. Then there was another thing about which a great fuss was going on, namely, the proposal to partition Bengal . . ."<sup>111</sup>

Curzon's Partition of Bengal caught India by surprise. The reaction was spontaneous and sudden. On 1 August 1905, Herbert Roberts stood in the Commons to ask the Secretary of State for India "whether he has received and considered a memorial, signed by 60,000 of the inhabitants of Eastern Bengal, protesting against the proposal of the Government of India in reference to the partition of Bengal", and, the Secretary of State replied: "The memorial was received by me yesterday, and will be duly considered, but the hon. Member will realise that the scheme of the Government of India was not decided upon without the fullest deliberation. The Government of India have framed a resolution on the subject of the reconstitution of the provinces of Bengal and Assam which I expect to receive from India in a few days."<sup>112</sup>

How, and in what manner, Curzon should have faced the Indian unrest which sprang from his Bengal partition is difficult to say. But he did not stay in India to solve the problem created by him. Over his difference with the Cabinet on another issue, he abruptly resigned, and while leaving the empire, he said in his farewell speech in Bombay in November 1905: "Let India be my judge."

Curzon left behind a problem which the National Congress and British Parliament had to grapple with for seven long years. It was their first trial of strength.

110. PP, Commons, Haldane, 21 June 1905.

111. Ibid.

112. PP, Commons, see Questions and Answers, 1 August 1905,

# 5

## A Trial of Strength

THE Indian National Congress was twenty years old in 1905 when Lord Curzon abdicated authority ending his administration. His ambition to push the Congress into its grave remained a mere day dream. The most powerful Governor-General since Dalhousie, Curzon precipitated a political crisis by his acts of omission and commission which went against the British interest. Like the Great Rising of 1857 following Dalhousie's administration, the historic Swadeshi movement emerged in the wake of Curzon's rule. Dalhousie alarmed the princely order by his Doctrine of Lapse, Curzon enraged the National Congress by his Partition of Bengal. It was at the end of Curzon's viceroyalty that the Congress entered its adulthood by declaring a war on the Government, and, in a trial of strength that continued for seven years, it won a victory over Parliament, at once spectacular and honourable.

Curzon had started losing popularity in India much before the British Cabinet thought of his second term of office. "You have now been four and a half years in office," wrote Hamilton to Curzon in April 1903, "you have done much for the Natives; but the Press are less friendly to you than they were two years ago . . . The truth is that the Congress papers have got in the back of their heads theories and plans which are inconsistent with the maintenance of the supremacy of British

rule in India. A new Viceroy is at first a subject of interest and investigation, as to whether he will or will not fall in with these views . . . And my impression is that, no matter how successful you are in maturing and consummating some of the reforms that you have in view, you will from a certain portion of the Native Press get no credit, but only abuse, in proportion as you succeed in your objects.”<sup>1</sup> But Curzon himself knew this and also the reasons for his unpopularity. Talking about his Indian critics vis-a-vis himself, he said: “I am an imperialist, and Imperialism is fatal to all their hopes. I hold the scales with exasperatingly even hand, and this is the last thing that they desire: they want the frank partiality of a Ripon. I have had a period of peace, and this deprives them of their most fertile source of grumbling. One by one I am taking up and laying down principles and lines of policy upon all the vexed questions of the day—Land Revenue, Education, Police, etc. Those lines are not their lines: for they do not wish for settlement or solution. They prefer the open sore which can always be kept angry by a twist of the goad.”<sup>2</sup> Curzon pressed for a second term when the Indian Press was calling him ‘the worst enemy that India has ever had’, and ‘shouting hoarsely for my recall’. In his own logic he viewed what appeared to be sinister motives of the Indian leadership. They “are overwhelming me with low abuse, and shrieking for my departure, not because I have not done well for India, or am not a friend to the Indian people—they know the contrary full well—but because they see that a further term of continued or increasing contentment among the masses, of administrative reform, and of grievances redressed, will weaken their own case against the British Power; because they know that I am neither to be wheedled nor frightened into making political concessions; and because they recognise that all my policy and my acts tend to rivet the British rule more firmly on to India and to postpone the longed-for day of emancipation.”<sup>3</sup>

With vengeance the Indian Press wrote about him as if ‘Curzon had got his second term and with greater vengeance he brought about his major measure to strike hard at the hotbed

1. HC, Mss. Eur. C 126/5, Hamilton to Curzon, 8 April 1903.

2. HC, Mss. Eur. D 510/14, Curzon to Hamilton, 9 July 1903.

3. *Ibid.*



of Indian politics by partitioning Bengal. He forgot the warning of George Hamilton while congratulating him on the second term. "Is it likely that the Young India Party would like a strong Viceroy with Imperialist ideas?"<sup>4</sup>

Curzon went out after his great work. Soon after his departure from India the Conservative Government in Britain yielded place to a strong Liberal Government. It was the first administration of Henry Campbell-Bannerman with H.H. Asquith as Chancellor of Exchequer, Marquis of Ripon as Lord Privy Seal, David Lloyd-George as the President of the Board of Trade and John Morley as the Secretary of State for India. The Conservatives had appointed a Conservative Viceroy Lord Minto, to succeed Curzon. The new Viceroy was as hostile to Congress as his predecessor. But, while Curzon would not recognise that body and was bitter in his hatred of it, Minto was willing to recognise the Congress while aiming at harming it as severely as possible. The Liberal Secretary of State with his Liberal Cabinet faced the difficult task of tackling a Conservative Viceroy and a militant Congress, while facing the situation arising out of Curzon's supreme achievement, the partition of Bengal.

As soon as Curzon's ideas of partition leaked out—that was when the Viceroy was still going very strong in India—the Congress recorded "its emphatic protest against the proposals of the Government of India, for the Partition of Bengal in any manner whatsoever."<sup>5</sup> The President of the Congress in that twentieth session in Bombay in December 1904, Henry Cotton, said: "We shall recognise that this is a matter of more than local interest when we recall that the sinister aspect of the proposal is to shatter, if it be possible to do so, the unity, and to undermine the feelings of solidarity which are so happily established among the members of a compact and national branch of the Empire."<sup>6</sup> A year later, Curzon was no longer the Viceroy but his partition had been worked upon, the Congress launched its movement to undo the work. Gopal Krishna Gokhale declared from the Presidential chair of the

4. HC, Mss. Eur. C 126/5, Hamilton to Curzon, 26 August 1903.

5. INC, Resolution XIV, Bombay, December 1904.

6. BML, 8023 aa 45, Twentieth Congress, Address of Henry Cotton, Bombay, 1904.

Congress in December 1905:

“Taking Lord Curzon at his highest, we find him engaged in a herculean attempt to strengthen the Englishman’s monopoly of power in India and stem the tide of popular agitation and discontent, rousing the members of the bureaucracy to a sense of duty similar to his own and raising the standard of administrative efficiency all round. The attempt has failed, as it was bound to fail. Never was discontent in India more acute and widespread than when the late Viceroy laid down the reins of office; and as regards the bureaucratic monopoly of power, I think, we are sensibly nearer the time when it will be successfully assailed . . .

“The scheme of partition, concocted in the dark and carried out in the face of the fiercest opposition that any Government measure has encountered during the last half a century, will always stand as a complete illustration of the worst features of the present system of bureaucratic rule—its utter contempt for public opinion, its arrogant pretensions to superior wisdom, its reckless disregard of the most cherished feelings of the people, the mockery of an appeal to its sense of justice, its cool preference of Service interests to those of the governed . . .

“The true Swadeshi movement is both a patriotic and an economic movement. The idea of Swadesh or ‘one’s own country’ is one of the noblest conceptions that have ever stirred the heart of humanity, As the poet asks,—

“Breathes there the man with soul so dead  
Who never to himself hath said,  
This is my own, my native land.”<sup>7</sup>

Gokhale however persuaded the Congress to share his belief that the new Liberal Secretary of State John Morley would try to meet the Indian aspirations with a sense of justice and consideration. Morley was no ordinary politician. Full of praise for him as ‘the reverent student of Burke, the disciple of Mill, the friend and biographer of Gladstone’, the Congress President hoped that Morley should courageously apply the principles of his preceptors and of his own to the affairs of India. “Or will he, too,” asked Gokhale, “succumb to the

7. INC, Presidential Address of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Banaras, December 1905,

influences of the India Office around him and thus cast a cruel blight on hopes which his own writings have done so much to foster?"<sup>8</sup>

The conflict over the partition, which was to last nearly seven years, turned national consciousness into national agitation. The Congress leadership right at the start of the anti-partition movement in 1905 was aware of the political developments that were likely to follow. They knew that the agitation was bound to continue for long and they thanked Curzon for having made that confrontation inevitable. As Surendranath Bannerjea put it in December 1905: "The most reactionary of the Indian Viceroys will go down to posterity as the Architect of the Indian National life."<sup>9</sup> Lord Curzon was compared by Gokhale with the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. 'There we find the same attempt at a rule excessively centralised and intensely personal, the same strenuous purpose, the same overpowering consciousness of duty, the same marvellous capacity for work, the same sense of loneliness, the same persistence in a policy of distrust and repression, resulting in bitter exasperation all round. I think even the most devoted admirer of Lord Curzon cannot claim that he has strengthened the foundations of British rule in India.'

The Congress wanted to wait for some time and see how Lord Minto and John Morley would react to Curzon's decree. "May we not, therefore, appeal to Lord Minto and Mr. John Morley, the new Secretary of State, to reverse the decree which has been passed upon us by Lord Curzon? May we not be permitted to indulge the hope that Lord Minto's mission in India is to conciliate, to throw oil upon the troubled waters, to undo the mischief wrought by his predecessor? As regards Mr. John Morley, we are all more or less his disciples . . . He has taught us in his life of Edmund Burke that Asiatics have rights and Europeans have their obligations in India . . . May we not ask him to apply his own principles to the solution of the Partition problem and the solution of other Indian

8. INC, Presidential Address of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Banaras, December 1905.

9. CC, *Twenty-first Congress*, Banaras, Surendranath Bannerjea, December 1905,

problems?"<sup>10</sup>

While some in the Congress expressed a desire to negotiate the issue with Morley, some others decided to throw a more radical challenge. Lajpat Rai, for example, declared in 1905: "Is it not a matter of shame for us that this National Congress in the last twenty-one years should not have produced at least a number of political Sanyasis that could sacrifice their lives for the political regeneration of the country?"<sup>11</sup> And, Madan Mohan Malaviya held out to the people the meaning of that 'very innocent exclamation'—*Bande Mataram*—which came to be regarded by the British as the most dangerous slogan since the days of the Mutiny.

Minto in India and Morley in England had no time to ponder over the partition issue. They had to at once make their own assessment of the problem. The partition had been effected before Minto came to India. The official papers showed that it was an administrative necessity to break a vast province into two separate units for the good of the rulers and the ruled. Papers also showed that the decision of Curzon's Government preceded long deliberations and detailed enquiry. The Indian Press, on the other hand, harped on the theme that almost every notable measure of Curzon's administration was directed against the Bengalis, and 'the Partition of Bengal was the veritable straw that broke the camel's back'.<sup>12</sup> The Viceroy made a study of the political situation arising out of the partition. He was told by top British officers that the agitation had no national basis and that it was the work of those who suffered loss in business, especially legal business, which tended to migrate from Calcutta to the capital of the new province of Eastern Bengal and other large cities. The Viceroy wrote to the Secretary of State:

"There is no doubt a great deal of truth in the assertion that the agitation has been unscrupulously fostered, and that influence has been brought to bear on the student class and the Universities to join in the movement. But at the same time I cannot but think there is much more genuine feeling in

10. CC, *Twenty-first Congress*, Banaras, Surendranath Bannerjea, December, 1905.

11. Ibid, Lajpat Rai, December 1905.

12. *The Tribune*, 9 December 1905.

the movement than the official mind is prepared to admit. It would be perhaps unfair for me to express myself too strongly as to a piece of legislation, the necessity of which it would only be possible thoroughly to understand after a detailed analysis of many considerations and an intimate knowledge of local feeling, but I cannot help suspecting that local feeling has been treated with some want of sympathy in aiming at what in the official mind is considered necessary for administrative machinery. The population of Bengal has no doubt bitterly resented the action which has taken so large a slice from the province, and which too they might perhaps have been more willing to sacrifice in another direction. If the East Riding of Yorkshire was for the best possible administrative reasons handed over to Lincolnshire, I think we should hear a good deal about it, and I believe it is incorrect to deny the existence of a somewhat similar feeling here."<sup>13</sup>

Minto was no friend of Curzon. But, he was after all a Conservative, and was loyal to that party for his appointment as Indian Viceroy. He felt convinced that partition could have been done in a better way by taking out Bihar and Orissa from Bengal proper rather than dividing the Bengali speaking population into two halves. Yet, true to Conservative principles, he promptly decided to uphold the partition as a 'settled fact'. His attitude added fuel to the fire and the anti-partition movement flared up.

Liberal Morley knew Curzon well. He had no doubt from the beginning that Curzon's partition measure was a political step to stem the tide of national awakening. True to Liberal ideologies, and in order to please pro-Indian radical Members in the Commons, he was mentally prepared to reconsider the question. Gopal Krishna Gokhale had met Morley when the latter was about to take over charge as the Secretary of State. The incoming Secretary was told of Indian grievances against the partition. Morley found Gokhale 'pleasant and attractive'. But he made no comment on the question saying that he knew nothing about the matter. On assumption of office, the Secretary wanted to wait and observe. Of course, he could not have reversed a major decision of a former

13. MRP, Minto to Morley, 13 December 1905.

Government all at once. He obviously required time. But, as he waited, the Conservative Viceroy felt bold enough to make policy statements of far-reaching significance. On 12 January 1906, a delegation of the Indian Association met the Viceroy, presented an address, and prayed for a reconsideration of the partition. Without moderation, Minto told the delegation that "he would be misleading them if he were to hold out any hopes of a reversal of the partition from the new Ministry."<sup>14</sup>

The new Liberal Ministry felt considerably perturbed at the developments in India particularly in view of the radical character of the House of Commons. Early in 1906, shortly after the general elections, the Cabinet observed with some dismay that 'the Labour Party has now at last assumed definite shape'. Though the British workmen were considered essentially bourgeois, 'without a bit of the French Red', yet the emergence of the Labour Party as a new force disturbed the old balance of political power. Morley discovered that there were at least 'five new men' in the Commons, Henry Cotton first of them, who were prepared to raise Indian questions. His worry was that the Labour Members were likely to be affected by sentiment in supporting pro-Indian views. A change in imperial attitudes was deemed necessary and Morley advised Minto:

"One thing I may as well mention to you at this early stage, for it much concerns the Government of India. The new Parliament, and the new Cabinet, will be in the highest degree jealous both of anything that looks like expansion, extension of protectorates, spheres of influence, and the like, and of anything with the savour of 'militarism' about it. I do not for a moment dream that the Government of India in your hands will follow in the steps of Curzon as to Tibet, Persia, the Amir."<sup>15</sup>

It was the internal unrest in India rather than any possible external adventures of the Indian Government which drew the attention of the new Parliament. In February 1906, the Cabinet faced an amendment to the King's Address in regard

14. *A.B. Patrika*, 15 January 1906.

15. MRP, Morley to Minto, 16 January 1906.

to the partition of Bengal. Herbert Roberts, described as one of the best among the British Indophils, informed the House:

“By the provisions of the Order for the partition, Bengal was divided into two. Eastern Bengal was added to Assam and a new province was formed under a Lieutenant-Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam. The main ground alleged for this change was that it was necessary because of the increased burdens of administration in Bengal, and the impossibility of maintaining in the circumstances, a high standard of efficiency. Now that proposition was not assented to by those who had the largest experience of the facts of the case . . . Surely when there was more than one alternative plan, it was unjust that that particular one which aroused discontent and indignation among the whole population connected with it should have been adopted.”<sup>16</sup>

In fact, the question of partition was discussed in India for quite some years, but only in 1903 the Indian Government drafted formal proposals. No action, however, was taken for full one year. When at length the proposals were known, the scheme at once met with the strongest opposition in all parts of Bengal. Unconcerned with the public feeling, the Government of India proceeded with the plan, and early in 1905 sent home a despatch containing the proposals to the then Secretary of State for India, Brodrick. In June 1905, the Conservative Government sent back a despatch to India practically sanctioning those proposals. Only a few days after, when the annual debate on the Indian Budget took place, notwithstanding the fact that the agitation against partition was at its height, not a single word was said during the debate by the then Secretary of State to indicate that the Home Government had approved of the scheme for partition. “Indeed,” charged Herbert Roberts, “the House of Commons knew nothing of the scheme officially until the early days of August last (1905), when the announcement of the proclamation bringing the scheme into operation was made.”<sup>17</sup> At once, some Indian sympathisers urged upon the

16. PP, Commons, Herbert Roberts, 26 February 1906.

17. Ibid.

Secretary of State to postpone the operation of the order till the House discussed relevant papers on the subject. The Government gave an indication that the operation might be postponed, but to the surprise of many, in September 1905, an announcement was made in papers that the order for the partition of Bengal would come into operation on 16 October.

Widespread discontent followed in India. It was said that every conceivable constitutional device was adopted to bring before the Government of India the feelings of the people of Bengal and their strong objection to the partition order. Petitions were presented, and public meetings were held in all parts of the country. It became obvious that the Bengalis as a people could not reconcile themselves to the partition of their land, and behind them stood the National Congress. The House of Commons was reminded:

“Bengal was the premier province of India. Considerations arose of race, language, intellectual development, historical associations, national aspirations. All those things had combined to create in the mind of the people of Bengal an intense pride in the land of their birth . . . This question of partition could not be looked upon from one standpoint alone. It must be remembered that it was but the culmination of a series of measures which, say what they liked, were interpreted by the people of India to mean a desire on the part of the Government to repress, curtail, and prevent future agitation. It was thought that that was the motive which underlay this order. It was the general impression of the people of India that the aim and object of this order dividing the Province of Bengal was to weaken the political power of that Province.”<sup>18</sup>

The reaction of Curzon's Government was contained in a despatch of the Government of India dated 9 April 1905: “It cannot be for the lasting good of any country that public opinion, or what passes for public opinion, should be manufactured by a comparatively small number of people at a single centre, and should be disseminated for universal consumption.”<sup>19</sup> The centre was obviously Calcutta. To divide Bengal

18. PP, Commons, Herbert Roberts, 26 February 1906.

19. PP, Commons, see Debates on King's Address, 26 February 1906.



was to weaken Calcutta. There were other evidence in support of the suspicion of the Indian people that the partition was not for administrative convenience but was a political punishment. The hurried manner in which Curzon and the Conservatives got the work done naturally created doubt about the real motive of the authors of the scheme.

Henry Cotton presented in the Commons a clear picture of the full story. His position was somewhat unique in the House because he had spent many years in service under the Crown in India, and on retirement, had gained complete confidence and trust of the Indian people 'who had appointed him in no informal manner their mouthpiece in this House'. There was no country, according to Cotton, more easy to administer than India, because, the people were 'docile, law-abiding and amenable'. But, with changing times, with growing aspirations and hopes, mere administration was not enough unless the Government fostered and protected the patriotic tendencies of the people. Instead, the people saw many reactionary measures forced on them. They saw legislation to curtail the liberty of Press and speech. They saw crusades against the so-called sedition. They witnessed an attempt to abolish trial by jury, which of course failed. They saw blows dealt at local self-government. They witnessed race disqualification for public offices, a policy to exclude the children of the soil from positions of responsibility. They saw the substitution of nomination for appointments in place of competitive examinations. They saw a policy of knitting together still more tightly the bonds of official control over departments of education. Many such measures of a reactionary tendency led to the people's dissatisfaction and unrest. Finally there came the partition of Bengal.

Henry Cotton disclosed that the talk on partition began so long ago as 1892, when it was proposed to separate a portion of the province and add it to Assam, on the ground that the whole of the north-east frontier of India should be placed under one administration. Nothing came out of that suggestion. In 1896, when Henry Cotton was himself at the head of the administration of Assam, the question came up again, and he agreed to the proposal that the control over the wild and savage tribes on the north-east frontier should be

transferred from Bengal to Assam. He, however, gave valid reasons against any transfer of what were called the regulation portions of the Province. His arguments prevailed and nothing was done so long as he was in India.

"But," said Henry Cotton, "in December 1903, certain proposals were put forward for dividing the province of Bengal—for annexing a considerable portion of the regulation districts to Assam. As soon as the proposal was put forward it was met with a perfect tornado of opposition . . . Lord Curzon then visited the affected districts, and made three speeches in different places, in which he endeavoured to subdue the agitation, but at the same time he adumbrated a much larger scheme of partition—one which proposed to divide Bengal in a more decisive manner than had hitherto been contemplated."<sup>20</sup>

In February 1905 when the Government of India sent its despatch to British Government, Cotton was present in India on a visit. He described in the Commons the fever of excitement which prevailed at that time, and which began to grow thereafter.

"Here was a question which had aroused Indian feeling to a degree unparalleled within his experience of the country, and the Government of India actually proceeded to legislation at Simla when not a single Indian Member was present in Council . . . There had been many meetings to protest . . . These meetings had been held in almost every village of the province, and never in the history of India had there been such evidence of public feeling as there had been in regard to this partition. All classes of the community were represented in these protests."<sup>21</sup>

Cotton argued that the partition was not really for administrative reason on the ground that the province of Bengal was too large and possessed too great a population for one man to administer. Although he had not himself held the office of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, he had nevertheless been Under-Secretary and Chief Secretary to seven successive

20. PP, Commons, Henry Cotton, 26 February 1906.

21. Ibid.

Lieutenant-Governors, and he was more closely associated with the Government of Bengal for a longer period than any other officer of his time in India. With such experience, he admitted that the Government of Bengal was a very heavy and arduous charge; but yet he pointed out that the work of a Lieutenant-Governor at the time of partition was actually lighter than what it was twenty or thirty years ago. In olden days, it was difficult to move about and get in touch with people. Consulting officers in different parts of the country was extremely difficult. But, with the expansion of telegraph and railways in every direction, things were different in Curzon's days. Even admitting that there was an administrative necessity for partition, it could have been safely done by separating non-Bengali areas from Bengal proper instead of breaking up the Bengali speaking population into two halves. Cotton claimed:

"It was no mere administrative reason that lay at the root of the partition scheme. That scheme was part and parcel of a policy intended to destroy political responsibility and to crush the patriotism of the Indian people."<sup>22</sup>

Everybody knew that it was not easy to undo the partition of Bengal. But the Indian sympathisers requested the Liberal Government to assuage the feelings in India by some modification of the arrangement. The best possible solution, as it appeared to some, was that the Bengal proper should be left intact with the Bengali-speaking people kept under one administration, while a new province should be created in the western direction of Bengal with Patna as its capital and containing within it the whole of Bihar and Chhota Nagpur. That was to comprise an area of about 80,000 square miles, with a population of over 30,000,000, and the whole of that area was to be practically a Hindustani-speaking area. As there was a marked difference between the peoples of Bihar and Bengal, the separation of the two areas for administrative reasons was not at all likely to lead to any popular resentment.

There were Members who tried to evoke some sympathy for the people of Bengal. "This country (England)," said C.J.

22. PP, Commons, Henry Cotton, 26 February 1906.

O'Donnell, "owed a great debt of gratitude to the Province (Bengal), for during the 100 years in which Great Britain had been building up its power in India, Bengal had been the milch cow from which we had drawn our resources."<sup>23</sup> Curzon's hostility towards Bengalis was discussed at some length, and the House was told of the popular belief that his Government had 'desired to strike a blow at intelligence and enterprise which had taken a form of which it did not approve'.<sup>24</sup>

Some farsighted Members looked at the empire of that time in a broader perspective of Asian development. "It was no exaggeration to say," said T. Hart-Davies, "we were now living in the beginning of a great world crisis. A new feeling had arisen over the whole of the East, a feeling which had attained its most extraordinary development in Japan, which would make the Government of our dependency of India a very anxious matter for many years to come."<sup>25</sup>

The Conservatives did not try to defend their action, carried through 'indecent haste and tortuous methods'. They wanted to see how the Liberal Government would meet the challenge. And, the Liberals were really in trouble. Without faith in Curzonian methods, and nervous in face of Indian agitation, they were also in no position to undo partition, since it might damage imperial prestige. The bureaucracy in India, headed by the Viceroy, supported partition. Any reconsideration of the scheme was bound to displease or even demoralise them. Right or wrong, any governmental decision required its execution with strength and determination. Caught between the bureaucratic will and popular agitation, the Liberal Secretary of State made his own task difficult by treating the partition as wrong, but deciding to uphold it as right. John Morley announced:

"The word 'partition' I am afraid is rather misleading, and we are apt to think of Poland and other nefarious transactions of that kind. I should be very sorry to admit that this was a partition in that sense. But it was, and remains, undoubtedly

23. PP, Commons, C.J. O'Donnell, 26 February 1906.

24. The Note of a Correspondent of the *Morning Post* who was travelling with the Prince of Wales in India at that time.

25. PP, Commons, T. Hart-Davies, 26 February 1906.

an administrative operation which went wholly and decisively against the wishes of most of the people concerned. It had been said, and unfortunately by an important person in India, that this demonstration of opposition in Bengal was 'machine-made opinion', that it was the work of political wire-pullers and political agitators. I have often heard that kind of allegation made before. Governments are apt, when an inconvenient storm of public opinion arises, to lay it at the door of political wire-pullers and agitators. There are, however, Indian officials of great weight and authority who entirely put aside that allegation or insinuation, and who argue that these Calcutta agitators would have had no response from the people they were appealing to if there had not been in the minds of the people a distinct feeling that they were going to suffer a great wrong and inconvenience; and, although no doubt the agitators could form and disseminate these views, yet these sentiments and views existed quite independently of any wire-pulling or agitation. That is my own conclusion derived from reading the papers. But the redistribution of Bengal is now a settled fact . . . Whether the partition was a wise thing or not when it was begun, I am bound to say that nothing was ever worse done so far as disregard of the feeling and opinion of the people is concerned."<sup>26</sup>

He disclosed the manner in which the Conservative Government betrayed the people of Bengal, and how when the scheme was made public, it was done bit by bit. The first proposal was to take certain areas in one direction, the second proposal was an extension and alteration of that, and the final scheme in which all those competitive efforts were summed up was never submitted to the judgment of anybody in Bengal. Criticising the Conservatives in so many words, the Liberal Secretary at the same time accepted their work as final, while assuring the radicals of his own liberal attitude towards everything. "I think," he said, "I gather already that I need not at all assure hon. Gentlemen who represent Indian interests specially, and I need not assure the House, that so long as I have any responsibility for Indian affairs I shall not be likely

to depart from those general principles of Liberalism—not in a Party sense, but in that sense in which both Parties, in my opinion, desire to see India governed.”<sup>27</sup>

The discussion on partition came to nothing. Morley satisfied himself that his opponents, ‘the Indians in the House of Commons’, made a poor show. He saw Henry Cotton decidedly ineffective, speaking nothing impressive. “Five others discharged maiden speeches, but with little of the grace and freshness poetically associated with maidens,” he ridiculed.<sup>28</sup> The Secretary’s mistaken belief was that he described the anti-partition agitation as a spent-bullet.

India was eagerly awaiting the outcome of the Commons debate and the outcome was that the partition was as much a settled fact for the Liberals as for the Conservatives. The news was greeted with mass protest meetings. At the College Square in Calcutta “A huge fire was lighted to which goods of British manufacture were consigned. Even the onlookers threw down into the fire the shirts, *chuddars*, and *salwars* of English make which they had on their persons. While these British goods were burning, shouts of *Bande Mataram* rent the skies.”<sup>29</sup> People took the *Swadeshi* vow. The leaders, who were restraining themselves after the return of the Liberals to power because of expectations of a reconsideration, urged the people for fresh agitation. Even top British administrators felt unhappy over Morley’s tactless statement in Parliament. Andrew Fraser, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal confided to Dunlop Smith, the Viceroy’s Private Secretary: “It will show the effect of Mr. Morley’s unfortunate statement that the agitation was subsiding. The statement was true; but it was unfortunate, because it has been interpreted to mean practically that agitation might prevail, that nothing need be yielded except to agitation, and that something might be yielded to that. This is a dreadful doctrine to find acceptance in Bengal or anywhere in India.”<sup>30</sup>

27. PP, Commons, John Morley, 26 February, 1906.

28. MRP, Morley to Minto, 2 March 1906.

29. *The Indian Mirror*, 3 March 1906.

30. MTP, Correspondence, vol. I, no. 102, Fraser to Dunlop Smith, 5 March 1906,

The agitation began to assume a clear shape. Its features became definite to the people at large as well as to the administration. One aspect of the agitation developed into what is known as *Swadeshi* movement. ('Swa' means 'own' and 'desh' means 'land'. The letter 'i' made the word an adjective. *Swadeshi* meant 'pertaining to one's own country'.) To begin with, it was an economic weapon. People were called upon to use home made goods and reject foreign goods. Subsequently, *Swadeshi* became a political ideal. The Government of the land should be in the hands of the sons of the land. It developed the concept of *Swaraj* or *Swarajya*, meaning, self-government. The *Swadeshi* movement thus provided the Indian nationalists with a positive ideal. It inspired the people to action to achieve a goal, however distant it might look at that time. The other aspect of the movement was a corollary of the *Swadeshi*, namely, the boycott of foreign goods. The immediate intention of the leaders was to force the British to reconsider the question of partition through the *Swadeshi* call.

It was obvious that the movement could not have been contained within constitutional limits. Anarchical and terroristic tendencies were slowly finding adherents towards the closing years of the nineteenth century. Before the partition of Bengal the cult of violence against the foreigners had already gripped the imagination of angry young patriots. The partition of Bengal lent that cult a moral base. The Bengali patriots nurtured a particular grievance against the English race because of the latter's well known reproach since the days of Macaulay that 'the Bengalis were a race of cowards'.<sup>31</sup> The youth of Bengal stood up to disprove it by killing whitemen and going to gallows. Faith in a 'physical force movement' slowly grew among some, and the credit goes to a graduate of Calcutta University, Miss Sarala Devi Ghosal, for organising an academy at Ballygunge in Calcutta for training young men in fencing and *Jiu-Jitsu*. A professional swordsman named Murtaza gave lessons to patriotic Bengalis in these subjects. That was in 1903. In no time *akharas* or gymnasia came up

31. See James Campbell Ker's Confidential Circular, *Political Trouble in India*, 7.

at many places in Bengal, where wrestling, lathi-wielding and difficult physical exercises were taught. Energetic Miss Ghosal spread her cult to prominent cities of Bengal such as Dacca and Mymensing. In 1905, at Mymensing, she converted a non-political organisation named *Surhid Samiti* into a political association. In Dacca, one of her disciples, Pulin Behari Das, began to organise a secret revolutionary group. In the meantime, other revolutionaries, such as Barindra Kumar Ghose and Jotin Bannerjee, were busy organising political groups of extreme ideologies. In the heat and fury of the *Swadeshi* agitation, political murder became inevitable.

The mass movement, on the other hand, followed more or less a constitutional pattern. But it was of an unprecedented character. The Central Government, as well as the Governments of the two separate provinces of Bengal were alarmed at the growing opposition to legitimate authorities. Especially, in the newly created province of Eastern Bengal, the newly appointed Lieutenant-Governor, Bampfylde Fuller had to face intense hostility from politically conscious people, led by the 'agitators'. He was appointed by Curzon, and was determined to resist all opposition to Curzon's partition, and that, too, typically in a Curzonian fashion. He hated Bengalis. "Their villainy as landlords is damnable," he felt. His measures against anti-partition agitation were harsh and ham-handed. His efforts to divide the population on communal lines became pronounced. His method of suppressing the agitation was so unusual that it only provoked people to unyielding resistance. Fuller's methods became a serious problem to Viceroy Minto. He informed Morley: "Fuller, the Lieutenant-Governor, though a pleasant man to talk to, does not at all impress me as likely to take a level-headed course of action, and there has been very stupid mismanagement there lately . . . I have not been at all pleased with what I have gathered of Fuller's doings."<sup>32</sup> The Secretary of State replied in anger:

"What you say of Fuller's doings is rather disquieting. The anti-partition people here are pretty sure to reopen the

32. MRP, Minto to Morley, 29 March 1906.



case in the House of Commons before long, and of course they are kept well-informed from India (with a few lies thrown in, I dare say), and if Fuller by excess or folly is making a substance for their case, he should be removed.”<sup>33</sup>

Morley’s apprehensions proved right. On 20 June 1906, O’Grady asked him in the Commons “whether, in view of the action of the Lieutenant-Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam, in dispersing by force the Bengal Provincial Conference, in preventing and breaking up peaceful and religious processions, in interfering with municipal commissioners and honorary magistrates and other persons who are in favour of the *Swadeshi* movement, in the frequent prosecution of school boys and in other measures, he (Morley) proposes to hold an inquiry by means of a commission, or otherwise, in order to devise means of allaying the unrest which now prevails in the new Province.”<sup>34</sup> The Secretary of State dismissed the idea of a commission, but was worried as to how he should deal with Fuller. Within a few weeks, the Secretary of State was again asked: “Whether the Lieutenant-Governor of Eastern Bengal continues to prohibit in certain districts the singing of the hymn *Bande Mataram*, or Hail Motherland, and still orders the punishment of school boys for singing the hymn.”<sup>35</sup> Questions on partition were persistently asked by pro-India Members. The House came to know that the Lieutenant-Governor neglected or refused to carry out in full the directions of the Secretary of State. It was an insult to Morley’s position, and embarrassed as he felt, he had to assure the House that hon. Members “will not find me slow to take such steps as may appear to me to be warranted by the facts.”<sup>36</sup>

To retain Fuller in power for any length of time was a great risk. The Secretary of State, therefore, advised the Viceroy to throw him out, and the Viceroy, while feeling helpless as regards the prestige of a Lieutenant-Governor, was obliged nevertheless to force him to a situation in which he had to resign. For the misconduct of some

33. MRP, Morley to Minto, 19 April 1906.

34. PP, Commons, O’Grady, 20 June 1906.

35. PP, Commons, Questions and Answers, 4 July 1906.

36. PP, Commons, Morley, 19 July 1906.

pupils of two private schools at Serajganj, the Lieutenant-Governor passed an order for the disaffiliation of the two schools. That proved too much. The Government of India requested him to withdraw his orders. Fuller replied:

"To withdraw from our position in this case would be to make a concession, not in the interests of education, but to those people in Calcutta who have been striving to render my Government impossible, in order to discredit the Partition . . . I have weighed very carefully my responsibilities in this matter. I appreciate the difficulties which arise out of the present political situation. It is my duty to do everything in my power to assist Your Excellency's Government, and to stand upon no considerations affecting my personal dignity or reputation. But it is my conviction that, if I give way in this matter, my authority will be so greatly weakened that I shall not be able to maintain that respect for the Government which is so essential for the maintenance of public order in this country; and I beg that Your Excellency will forgive me for venturing to ask that these orders may be reconsidered, or that, if I am to give effect to them, my resignation may be accepted."<sup>37</sup>

Fuller's resignation was accepted on 3 August 1906. A happy Secretary of State had written to the Viceroy only a day earlier: "I hope that by the time you get this letter, the Fuller episode will have become a matter of ancient history. If by chance it raises a clatter in the press or among the Civil Service, then I hope, and I believe, that you will treat it with stoical indifference, true to the Scotch motto—'What do they say—let them say'."<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the Anglo-Indian Press and the Civil Service at once started criticising the Central Government for sacrificing Fuller to please the agitators. It was, so they felt, a sign of weakness of no mean consequence, an omen for the future. The Viceroy was personally not very happy over Fuller's fall, yet he confessed later on: "I am ready to repeat as often as I can that it was the luckiest day in the world for us when he resigned."<sup>39</sup>

37. MRP, see J.B. Fuller's letter to the Viceroy, 15 July 1906.

38. MRP, Morley to Minto, 2 August 1906.

39. MRP, Minto to Morley, 18 November 1906.

The most surprised man was Fuller. He never thought that his threat of resignation would lead to his virtual dismissal. He had considered himself indispensable. Ironically, Fuller forgot the lesson of Curzon's threat of resignation leading to his departure. When ultimately the axe fell, the disgraced Lieutenant-Governor wrote to the Viceroy:

"It is always possible to take a philosophical view of misfortune. I think that it was inevitable, in present circumstances, that the man who was selected to carry through the partition of Bengal should lose his life and the enterprise."<sup>40</sup>

In the nationalist circles the fall of Fuller was welcomed as a victory of the people over the Government. It was their first triumph in the battle against partition. After all, it was the fall of the lieutenant of Curzon, the author of the partition. And, hence, they thought that the battle against partition should be continued with redoubled vigour.

As the *Swadeshi* agitation began to gain momentum, the Secretary of State decided to initiate a bold step regarding India's future. Many in the Congress hoped from the Liberal Ministry a liberal measure of constitutional concessions. The radicals in Parliament were pressing for the same. Morley's immortality would be assured, Parliament's pleasure could be acquired, and perhaps, the Indian anti-partition agitation could be contained and finally the *Swadeshi* movement would be ended, if only one magic word could be proclaimed before all parties concerned—Reform.

John Morley, therefore, announced in Parliament on 20 July 1906 a most significant policy. "This is a new Parliament," he began, "and I believe it has a long life before it. There are abundant signs that this new Parliament recognises to the full its highest responsibilities for the Government of India . . . There are some people to whom Indian policy means the North-West Frontier, some to whom it means Persia, others to whom it means opium; but our Indian policy, when you come to look at it with responsibility, demands a far more comprehensive survey than this and a due sense of propor-

40. MTP, Correspondence, vol. II, no. 45, Fuller to Minto, 13 August 1906,

tion.”<sup>41</sup> The philosopher Secretary spoke at length, at times his thought confused. He would not agree with the general belief that India had always been excluded from the sphere of party politics. He recollected the good old days of Pitt and Fox, and of the recent years when Gladstone won his great elections and found that some of the tough fights in party history had been on Indian question. Thereafter he hastened to say: “I am glad to think that at this moment India is not in any sense or degree a Party question . . . We are all agreed it is best and wisest to exclude India from the field of our ordinary Party operations.”<sup>42</sup>

In one sense, India at that time came under a Conservative-Liberal entente as regard to her present and future development. The Liberal Secretary of State talked of reforms, the Conservative Viceroy elaborated plans for repression. The Liberals and radicals recognised India’s national aspirations; the Conservatives and bureaucrats worked to break national harmony through communal considerations. The result of that balance and compromise [was far-reaching. It is dealt with in the next chapter.

Morley assured the Commons that India was not an insoluble problem. He prided that he placed himself in contact with as many people as possible from India, people of every type, of every class—native rulers with ‘dark faces, in white silken turbans wreathed’, the ‘sun-dried bureaucrats’, soldiers, travellers, journalists, military officers, and the ‘pestilent agitators’. “Then there is the Congress. I do not know that I agree with all that the Congress desires; but, speaking broadly of what I conceive to be at the bottom of the Congress, I do not see why any one who takes a cool and steady view of Indian Government should be frightened. I will not at once conclude that because a man is dissatisfied and discontented, therefore he is disaffected. Our own reforms and changes have been achieved by dissatisfied men who were no more disaffected than you or I.”<sup>43</sup> At long last, he gave the

41. PP, Commons, John Morley, 20 July 1906.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

House an indication of what he was going to do for India by way of granting constitutional concessions.

"In all that I have said I shall not be taken to indicate for a moment that I dream you can transplant British institutions wholesale into India. That is a fantastic and ludicrous dream. Even if it could be done, it would not be for the good of India. You have got to adapt your institutions to the conditions of the country where you are planting them. You cannot transplant bodily the venerable oak of our constitution to India, but you can transplant the spirit of our institutions—the spirit, the temper, the principles, and the maxims of British institutions. All these you can transplant and act upon and abide by. You cannot give universal suffrage in India, and I do not insist that India should be on the same footing as our self-governing Colonies, like Canada."<sup>44</sup>

Morley's main objective was to pacify India. He knew that the National Congress as well as the advanced sections of educated people in India believed in their own competence to share administrative responsibilities. A compromise between imperial autocracy and national aspirations became imperative. It was going to be indeed an experiment without parallel that there should co-exist an autocratic person as the Viceroy of India with his absolute Government on one side and 'free speech and free right of meeting' from the side of a subject population. The personal and the absolute element in British administration was of course inevitable. But in face of the Indian agitation, the Liberal strategy was to try an experiment that India 'can have a strong and effective administration along with free speech and free institutions, and being all the better and all the more effective because of free speech and free institutions'.

The Liberal Government's policy statement regarding constitutional concessions to India created a stir in Parliament. To radicals like Keir Hardie what was needed was immediate positive steps, not promises for some distant future. He suggested that some educated Indians should be appointed to the Council of the Secretary of State for India. But the very

44. PP, Commons, John Morley, 20 July 1906.

indication of Liberal policy appeared too dangerous even to some of the Liberal Members, not to speak of the Conservatives. Reports were reaching that the people of India 'were trembling with expectation of what this new Parliament would do for the realisation of their wishes'.<sup>45</sup> That was the sort of expectation which appeared to some as fatal to British rule. "How was the Government of India to be carried on if it were accepted that a change of Ministers in this country involved a change in the policy of the Viceroy and all the officials in India," asked one of the leading Liberals.<sup>46</sup> From Liberal benches it was pointed out that it was not always wise to be swayed by the opinion of such men as Gopal Krishna Gokhale or Ramesh Chandra Dutt who delivered 'most moderate and admirable' speeches while in England, but spoke very differently in India. An instance was quoted as to how Gokhale preached among his people that 'the welfare of India was subordinated to the selfish interests of Europeans'.<sup>47</sup>

While discussing Morley's announcement about Reforms, the House of Commons found it necessary to discuss Bengal partition. The Congress, of course, was subjected to severe criticism. If British troops were removed, asked a Member, what would become of the Indian Congress and the malcontents? 'There would not be very much left of them'. The Secretary of State was told that the agitation against the British rule was carried on by a microscopic minority of the people. "How many of the 80,000,000 of the people of Bengal would have known or knew even now that there was such a thing as the partition of Bengal at all if they had not been carefully tutored," asked W. Evans-Gordon.<sup>48</sup> In his view, some members of Parliament were responsible for fostering agitation by their speeches in the House. Henry Cotton had to listen to the attacks from both sides of the House.

India's main concern was the undoing of the partition,

45. The news in *The Times* quoted in the Commons by the hon. Member for Montgomery, 20 July 1906.

46. PP, Commons, Rees, 20 July 1906.

47. Ibid, see Reference to Gokhale's speech.

48. PP, Commons, W. Evans-Gordon, 20 July 1906.

though a secondary concern among the moderates was constitutional reforms. Morley's policy announcement no doubt pleased some of the Congress leaders, but to many of them, the main issue was the agitation against the partition. Even a man like Dadabhai Naoroji declared in the Calcutta Congress in December 1906:

"We hear a great deal about agitators and agitation. Agitation is the life and soul of the whole political, social and industrial history of England . . . Agitate, agitate over the whole length and breadth of India in every nook and corner—peacefully of course—if we really mean to get justice from John Bull."<sup>49</sup>

Bepin Chandra Pal said:

"The Car of Juggernaut is the car of progress; it moves slowly but it moves surely to its own destination. Those who pull the ropes of the Car, calling God and *Bande Mataram*, will be saved; those who oppose the car of progress will be crushed under its wheels, whether it be Hindu or Moham-medan, whether it be in Bengal or in any other province."<sup>50</sup>

Since the Government had declared Bengal partition as a 'settled fact', the Congress had to adopt a definite policy towards partition vis-a-vis the agitation. Similarly, a clear policy towards the boycott of British goods and in favour of the *Swadeshi* was considered essential. The Calcutta Congress of 1906, therefore, passed the following resolutions.

"Resolved that having regard to the fact that the people of this country have little or no voice in its administration, and their representations to the Government do not receive due consideration, this Congress is of opinion that the boycott movement inaugurated in Bengal by way of protest against the partition of that Province was, and is, legitimate."

"Resolved that this Congress accords its most cordial support to the *Swadeshi* movement and calls upon the people of the country to labour for its success, by making earnest and sustained efforts to promote the growth of indigenous industries and to stimulate the production of indigenous articles by

49. CC, Dadabhai Naoroji, Calcutta Congress, December 1906.

50. CC, Bepin Chandra Pal, Calcutta Congress, December 1906.

giving them preference over imported commodities, even at some sacrifice.”<sup>51</sup>

The Congress resolutions were indeed mild. But many ardent leaders wanted the agitation to take a militant form. In fact, the Congress was hastening towards a split on the question of moderation or extremism. While the moderates believed in British promises of constitutional reforms and wanted to adopt a cautious policy towards the Government in anticipation of valuable gains, the extremists wanted to secure their goals through struggle. It may be noted here that in the pre-Gandhian days the concept of a non-violent movement was unknown to India and the Congress. The European revolutionary philosophy and the European national movements such as Italian Risorgimento appealed to the ardent Indian nationalists. The Congress as a body did not approve of violent methods. But, there were Congress leaders who believed in revolutionary activities of a more militant character. And, there were patriots outside the Congress who did not believe in methods such as passing annual resolutions or making periodical appeals to Parliament. They believed in violent action.

In that atmosphere the year 1907 saw the beginning of organised political violence in India. The year had its significance. It was fifty years after the Great Indian Rising of 1857. The memory of the great leaders of that Revolt was part of the Indian sentiment. It was appropriate that the new patriots should think of commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of 1857. A wave of sentiment swept over the Punjab in favour of observing the anniversary, sparked by the desire to erase a historical stigma that the Rising of 1857 was suppressed by the British with the help of the Sikh soldiers. There were, of course, economic grievances arising out of administrative policies in respect of the Canal Colony and enhancement of water tax, etc., which fostered anti-British feelings among the Punjabi peasants. Assaults were made on Europeans in Lahore and Rawalpindi. Anti-British feelings swayed the military pensioners in Lyallpur district. In Ferozepore, seditious meet-

51. INC, Resolutions, Calcutta, December 1906.



ings were attended even by 'several hundred sepoys' of the Sikh regiments. To the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, the situation appeared 'exceedingly serious, exceedingly dangerous, and urgently demanding a remedy'.<sup>52</sup> In May 1907, a riot broke out in Rawalpindi where the mobs attacked and damaged the houses of the deputy commissioner, district judge, superintendent of police, and Christian missionaries. Stray Europeans were attacked in streets.<sup>53</sup>

Lord Kitchener, the Commander-in-Chief, kept a vigilant watch on the Indian army. In March 1907 a clandestine circular was discovered at Mardan, the headquarters of the Guides, telling the Indian troops that it was very easy to throw off the British rule. The Government became alert. Kitchener assured the Viceroy: "On the whole it may be confidently stated that, in the light of such information as we possess at present, there is no reason to suppose that the seditious agitation has obtained any real foothold amidst the native troops."<sup>54</sup> The story of the observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the Sepoy Mutiny had worried the British to such an extent that the King-Emperor wrote to the Viceroy in due course: "The seditious movements in India have caused me serious anxiety, and most earnestly do I trust that you and your Government will display the greatest firmness. If we are to retain our hold on the country, we must endeavour to crush the present disloyalty with a high hand or else we may have similar troubles as we had 50 years ago!"<sup>55</sup>

It is interesting to note that just as there was some proposal to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Indian Rising by the Indian patriots and sepoys, there was also a strong feeling among some patriotic Englishmen in England to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the suppression of the Rising. Lord Roberts put forth his suggestions for a jubilee of the Mutiny Campaigns. But the Viceroy warned the home authorities:

52. J.C. Ker, *Political Trouble in India: A Confidential Report*, 23.

53. MTP, Diary, M.1069.

54. MTP, Correspondence, 1907, vol. I, no. 237, Kitchener to Minto, 12 May 1907.

55. MTP, Letters, HM, no. 23, King Edward to Minto, 17 July 1908.

"Anything of the sort is . . . utterly out of the question. I cannot imagine any one, who has ever thought twice about it, making such a proposal. The story of the Mutiny is a splendid page in our history—a story of magnificent courage and endurance which our Indian troops in many cases faithfully shared with us, but I cannot say how wrong I feel it would be to revive the memory of those times throughout India—above all, at the present moment."<sup>56</sup>

Though Mutiny Campaigns anniversary could not be celebrated, to men like Lord Curzon it appeared quite appropriate to celebrate the hundred-fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Plassey. Curzon began to canvass support for his ideas through the British Press. His proposals included the erection of a suitable memorial to Robert Clive, the founder of the British empire. Obviously, the site for the proposed memorial was to be Calcutta. On receipt of the news, an angry Viceroy asked the Secretary of State: "How would Bengal in these stormy days look upon a monument to Clive coupled with Plassey?"<sup>57</sup>

England had no emotional need to celebrate either the Battle of Plassey or the suppression of the Sepoy Mutiny. The proposals on those lines, therefore, came to nothing. But, in India, the atmosphere was different. Revolutionary activities were spreading with or without a reference to memories.

In the Punjab, from where disturbing reports were reaching the Government, two persons were particularly considered arch enemies of the British rule and pioneers of a seditious movement. They were Lala Lajpat Rai and Munshi Ajit Singh.

Lajpat Rai was acknowledged as a great intellectual even by his enemies. His philosophy of struggle appeared to the British extremely dangerous. In the Punjab, among various sections of population, his name was synonymous with an appeal to revolt. Ajit Singh was a renowned scholar. He had taught Oriental languages to Europeans. The Government came to know that he was teaching a certain Russian named Lesseff • who was considered a dangerous person. A powerful orator,

56. MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. III, 3 September 1906.

57. Ibid, vol. V, 18 April 1907.

Ajit Singh could rouse his audience for violent actions. In 1907, with rumours spreading about an impending agitation, the Government thought it necessary to put an end to the activities of Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh by some drastic measure. Accordingly, Regulation III of 1818 was invoked to effect their arrest and deportation. Lajpat Rai was arrested on 9 May 1907 and Ajit Singh on 2 June, and both were sent to Mandalay. This firm step was intended to cow down other revolutionaries. But, the natural reaction of many patriots was to turn more radical.

Politics moved swiftly. The Congress was forced to a situation to opt between policies of moderation and extremism. The intelligent Secretary of State realised the likely consequence of a policy of strength under a century-old regulation. It might boomerang. Radical opinion in England also became critical of the government measures such as deportation. The Viceroy had to assure the home authorities: "As to Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh I have not a shadow of a doubt that we must in common justice release them and that the sooner we do so the better."<sup>58</sup> He further confessed: "Lajpat is undoubtedly a man of high character and very much respected by his fellow-countrymen, and if, when I was asked to arrest him, I had known what I do now, I should have required much more evidence before agreeing."<sup>59</sup>

Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh were released in November 1907. The news was received with jubilation in nationalist quarters. And, in England, the Secretary of State received such profuse congratulations from the radical members of Parliament that he said jokingly: "If I receive many more felicitations of the same stamp, I shall have . . . to lock Lajpat up again as soon as possible."<sup>60</sup>

The release of Lajpat, however, failed to persuade Tilak and his comrades to approve of the moderate policies of the Congress. Some of the Congress extremists decided to propose the name of Lajpat Rai to the august office of the President

58. MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. VII, 5 November 1907.

59. Ibid.

60. MRP, Morley to Minto, vol. II, 14 November 1907.

of the Congress for the year 1907. Gokhale and the moderates opposed the idea. They firmly believed that any extremist posture on the part of the Congress would upset the chances of Liberal Government agreeing to radical reforms. But the extremists would not believe in the possibility of early reforms. They persisted in their demand to make Lajpat Rai the Congress President. In order to avert a possible split, Lajpat Rai declined to become party President. The extremists, therefore, wanted Tilak to become the Congress President.

In the midst of these developments, the National Congress headed towards the tragedy of Surat. In December 1907, amid great confusion, the twenty-third session of the Indian National Congress had to be suspended *sine die*. The event was described by H.W. Nevinson thus:

“Leaping, climbing, hissing the breath of fury, brandishing long sticks, they (Tilak’s followers) came, striking at any head that looked to them Moderate, and in another moment, between brown legs standing upon the green-blaze table, I caught glimpses of the Indian National Congress dissolving in chaos.

“Like Goethe at the battle of Valmy, I could have said, ‘To-day marks the beginning of a new era, and you can say that you were present at it’.”<sup>61</sup>

✓ Surat did not see the death of the Congress. The session only divided its leadership for a brief period. The moderates went on expecting an announcement of the proposed reforms. The extremists breathed radicalism to inspire revolutionary ideals in the minds of the youth.

✓ To many bureaucrats it appeared that the Surat split was a welcome news for the British. But the crafty Secretary of State made a correct assessment. He said: “The news has just come in that the Congress, so far from being merely ‘flat’ as I expected, has gone to pieces, which is the exact opposite of being flat, no doubt. For it means, I suppose, the victory of Extremist over Moderate, going no further at this stage than the break-up of the Congress, but pointing to a future stage in which the Congress will have become an

<sup>61</sup>. H.W. Nevinson in *The New Spirit in India*, see CC, 218.

Extremist organisation.”<sup>62</sup> The Viceroy, however, made a different assessment. To him it appeared: “It is quite impossible to see how the Congress collapse will work out, but so far everything points to the disappearance of the Extremists and to some reasonable recognition by the Moderates of our intentions. I feel pretty sure that this will be the case for a time—it is a great triumph for us.”<sup>63</sup>

Outside the Congress circles, in the meantime, extremist ideals were spreading in the form of anarchism. As a philosophy, anarchism was preached by some individuals in and outside India. Its cult appealed to a select band of revolutionaries who believed in action. Shyamaji Krishnavarma\* was advocating sedition from abroad. By July 1907 his activities in England came to the notice of the authorities and demands were made in the House of Commons for action against him. Krishnavarma thereupon left England, and settled in Paris at 10, Avenue Ingres, Passy. He wrote in his well-known one-penny monthly, the *Indian Sociologist*, in September 1907:

“Just ten years ago, when our friend Mr. Bal Gangadhar Tilak and the Natu Brothers were arrested, we decided to leave India and settle in England, and now that another friend, Lala Lajpat Rai, has been deported it falls to our lot to quit England, and at much expenses and personal inconvenience make Paris our headquarters.”<sup>64</sup>

62. MRP, Morley to Minto, vol. II, 27 December 1907.

63. MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. VIII, 15 January 1908.

\* He was born in Kathiawar in 1857. In 1879 he went to England and graduated from Balliol College in 1882. In 1884 he was called to the Bar. Returning to India he got employment in some princely states but was subsequently dismissed and left for England again. There, within a few years, he became a convinced radical and a revolutionary with belief in secret anarchist missions. In 1905, he organised what came to be known as India Home Rule Society, with himself as the President. It was known subsequently that it was H.M. Hyndman who inspired Krishnavarma to form that society ‘to secure Home Rule for India’. In 1905, Krishnavarma began publishing the famous one-penny monthly *Indian Sociologist*.

64. *The Indian Sociologist*, September 1907, see J.C. Ker, *Political Trouble in India*, Confidential Report, 175.

From Paris, Krishnavarma carried on his revolutionary propaganda. It is interesting to note that for two or three years his *Indian Sociologist* was being printed in England by his English friends, Arthur F. Horsley and Guy Aldred who were at last prosecuted by the British Government and convicted in 1909. Thereafter the paper was printed in Paris and despatched secretly to many places in India. The *Indian Sociologist* used to contain revolutionary messages such as the following:

“It seems that any agitation in India now must be carried on secretly, and that the only methods which can bring the English Government to its senses are the Russian methods vigorously and incessantly applied until the English relax their tyranny and are driven out of the country.”<sup>65</sup>

“As to the ethics of dynamite, it may be laid down in a general way that where the people have political power there is no need for the use of explosives. It only promotes reaction. But where the people are utterly defenceless, both politically and militarily, then one may look on the bomb or any other weapon as legitimate.”<sup>66</sup>

While Shyamaji Krishnavarma created a small following of revolutionary activists in England, in India, it was the message of Aurobindo Ghosh that inspired a sense of dedication among the youth to the cause of motherland. The sensational Maniktolla Bomb Conspiracy case was a manifestation of that daring spirit. The conspiracy came to light after a bomb outrage at Muzaffarpore on 30 April 1908. The bomb was actually meant to kill D.H. Kingsford, the district judge of the place. But, by a mistake it was thrown on the carriage in which Mrs. and Miss Kennedy, the wife and daughter of a barrister, were travelling. They were attacked near the residence of D.H. Kingsford who was coming in a similar carriage just behind. Miss Kennedy died on the spot. Mrs. Kennedy died of the wounds a few hours later. The investigating authorities at once got busy. The philosophy behind the outrage was found out to be the belief in offering ‘revolu-

65. *The Indian Sociologist*, December 1907.

66. *Ibid*, August 1908.

tionary sacrifice to the goddess Kali', on the auspicious night of the *Amavasya*—a ritual in the cult of *Shakti Puja* or worship of power. The plan for the murders was hatched at a place called Maniktolla, in the north-eastern suburbs of Calcutta. The place was owned by Aurobindo Ghosh and his brother Barindra Kumar Ghosh.

The young man who threw the bomb was Khudiram Bose. His associate in that mission was Profulla Chandra Chaki. The latter committed suicide when he was about to be arrested. Khudiram was arrested and was forced to make a confession.

The authorities believed that the Muzaffarpore outrage was part of a bigger plan to assassinate Europeans. In other words, there was a deep-rooted conspiracy to unleash anarchical activities. In December 1907, there was an attempt to blow up the train in which the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal was travelling. Early in April 1908, a bomb was hurled at M. Tardival, the Mayor of French Chandernagore. The Government ultimately traced one of the main centres of the conspiracy; it was in the Maniktolla garden.

A sudden raid was conducted on that place on 2 May 1908. Several members of a terrorist group were caught on the spot. "Buried underground or stored in boxes at various places in the garden were a few guns and sporting rifles and eight revolvers, as well as a forge and other machinery for making bombs, and large quantities of acids for preparing explosives. There was also one finished bomb ready for use, besides large quantities of picric acid already prepared, dynamite catridges, and 25 lbs. of dynamite. In addition there was a large amount of printed matter and correspondence, including books upon explosives and military training. Marks of revolver bullets on targets of white wash on the trees of the garden indicated that revolver shooting was also practised. The search in short showed that the garden was a regular school for practical instruction in revolutionary methods and in the manufacture of explosives, and a cyclostyled text-book was found giving in minute detail instructions for preparing explosives and bombs."<sup>67</sup>

67. J.C. Ker, *Political Trouble in India: 1907-1917*, Confidential Report, 139-140.

There were a few other centres too, like the one on the Harrison Road, where revolutionary literature and bombs were found. The Government wanted to identify the man behind the movement and it suspected that it was Aurobindo Ghosh. In all, 38 persons were brought to trial. Two were executed on the charge of murdering the approver inside the jail. Barindra Kumar Ghosh and three others were sentenced to transportation for life. Three others were sentenced to transportation for ten years, four for seven years, and three were sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for five years. But the most surprising result of the trial was the acquittal of Aurobindo Ghosh. The Lieutenant-Governor, Andrew Fraser, had reported it to the Governor-General just at the opening of the trial:

"He (Aurobindo Ghosh) is the ring leader. He is able, cunning, fanatical: these qualities have the vigour in him which they not infrequently have in the man who is not quite sane. He is the leader. He is regarded and spoken of by all as the disciples regard a great Master. He has been in the forefront of all, advising seditious writing and authorising murder. But he has kept himself, like a careful and valued general, out of sight of 'the enemy'. We cannot get evidence against him such as would secure his conviction in a court."<sup>68</sup>

The Government of India began to think of ways to stop 'his power for mischief'. But the question was how to stop the cult of anarchism in the country. To render one individual harmless did not mean much. Soon after the Maniktolla conspiracy case was understood in its wider implication, Lord Curzon delivered an impressive speech in the British House of Lords to depict how gloomy was the future. On 30 June 1908, he said:

"A man who has administered the Government of India for nearly seven years cannot lose his interest in that great country. In my case, indeed, it is coterminus with my life . . . During the two and a half years since I came back from India I have not, I hope, said one word to embarrass the adminis-

68. MTP, Correspondence, 1908, vol. I, no. 239, Fraser to Minto, 10 May 1908,



tration of the noble Viscount (Minto) or to render his difficult task more difficult . . . Events have been moving very rapidly during the past few months in India. It is a mistake, however, to regard the movement as a new thing. For years there has been a party in India implacably opposed to British rule in that country . . . But lately these symptoms of unrest have developed with really alarming rapidity until finally they have culminated in what cannot be otherwise described than as a menace, not merely to Government, but to the very structure on which society itself is based in India.

“When we read of attacks being made on Europeans in the great military station of Rawalpindi, of serious agitation among the peasants of the Punjab, of disgraceful riots in the remote and hitherto entirely peaceful corners of Madras, of prominent citizens being arrested for sedition in Bombay, and of the whole chapter of events in Bengal, it is evident that there is a movement in existence in India which has wide ramifications, which is backed by a powerful and unscrupulous organisation, which is supported by large funds, which does not spring from any local or isolated cause, but which is part of a deliberate campaign conducted against British Government in that country. Moreover, my Lords, we must remember that, though the classes which propagate sedition may be numerically small, they are the classes which have almost the monopoly of education and the influence which education gives . . . I do not think, therefore, that we ought to underrate the seriousness of this movement.”<sup>69</sup>

Curzon knew the root causes of the Indian unrest even if the causes were complex or even obscure. The Indian anarchists were patriotic youngmen who yearned for the liberation of their country by any means. Curzon knew how among the personal assets of one of the latest corps of bomb-throwers there were such books as ‘Mill on Liberty’ and ‘Burke on the French Revolution’. That kind of consciousness was the spark which led to the ultimate conflagration. To the ex-Viceroy, Western civilisation had sharpened the consciousness of those youngmen without forming their

69. PP, Lords, Curzon, 30 June 1908.

character. He did not pause to think if courage to die for motherland was not character in itself.

Curzon blamed his countrymen for their encouragement of the Indian unrest. "I am referring," he said, "to the utterances, sometimes ignorant and irresponsible, sometimes deliberate and malignant, of a small knot of Englishmen who have been preaching the doctrines of self-government for years to the Indians, denouncing the British Government which they very likely have themselves served, and pouring contempt on the race from which they themselves are sprung. Some of these men have been members of the Civil Service, which they have left under conditions producing a sense of personal grievance in their minds. Some of them are English Members of Parliament, some of them are journalists, some of them are itinerant orators of the emotional type who pay visits of a few weeks to India to tell the people there what they ought to do, and then come back here and tell us what we ought to do. Nearly all of them belong to the extreme wing of the Radical Party."<sup>70</sup>

"These persons particularly if they have M.P. added to their name, have a valuation in India greatly in excess of that which they enjoy here; and when they go to India and tell the people there that they are ruled by a Russian despotism or that the methods of their Government are worse than Armenian atrocities, it is supposed that they know something about Russia and Armenia, and are talking truth. It is possible to show that some of the utterances of which I am speaking have been directly responsible for some of the consequences that have ensued; and when we tabulate as I am endeavouring to do, the causes of this movement, let us not deny a prominent place to the pernicious action and inflammatory writings of some of our own countrymen."<sup>71</sup>

It is difficult to know if Curzon realised at any time that he was partly responsible for the sudden spurt of Indian unrest.

- The partition of Bengal was his act and that episode was the immediate cause of the militant agitation then raging in India.

70. PP, Lords, Curzon, 30 June 1908.

71. Ibid.

Anarchism was only one aspect of that agitation. The cause of freedom represented a broader perspective in which methods of action varied according to circumstances. The partition of Bengal made the agitation widespread. The Government repression only aggravated the situation. Violence inspired violence. But in his assessment of the situation, Curzon delinked the partition issue from the Indian unrest. The motive of the ex-Viceroy was thus clear. He did not want to be held responsible in any way for the political crisis which his successor in India faced. There is no doubt that the general political awakening did disturb the authorities. India was getting critical of the British rule. But at the same time, fuel was added to the fire by individuals or organisations in a direct or indirect manner. Curzon was a great Viceroy. His anti-Congress posture was well-known. His motive behind partitioning Bengal was known even to school boys. The general discontent against the Government became sharper in the wake of a Government measure of immense magnitude against which only an organised movement could fight. That movement, of course, was confined to the affected area. But the echo of the movement resounded all over India. The sympathy for Bengal and the hostility against the Government became an all-India phenomenon. But Curzon clung to his own interpretation of things. He said:

"I come to a question which has excited a great deal of attention—I allude to the so-called partition of Bengal. More exaggerated nonsense has been talked about this question than almost any other question of contemporary Indian politics. We are told that it is the main cause of the unrest throughout India. If the unrest were confined to Bengal there might be some plausibility in that plea; but do the peasants of the Punjab or the people of Tuticorin care two pence about the partition of Bengal? They have not the slightest idea what it means. You might just as well say that the rejection of the Scottish Land Bill by this House was responsible for the agitation in Macedonia or the outrages at Lisbon."<sup>72</sup>

Curzon might have said this to show that the agitation in

India did not stem from Bengal partition. But he also boldly attempted to dissociate himself from the partition as it was carried out. It was one of the most surprising statements in connection with the partition. Curzon said:

“But the credit for that, if credit it be, was not mine. The ultimate form which the partition took, and which differed very materially from the proposals I put forward in the first place, was conceived when the Government of India was in the hands of my noble friend Lord Ampthill. When I returned to India, I found that he had courteously reserved the matter for my decision, and, knowing the sincerity and the thoroughness with which the matter had been discussed by his Government, I readily acquiesced in their views.”<sup>73</sup>

Curzon's attempt to prove that he was not responsible for the partition of Bengal in the manner it was ultimately done knocked the bottom out of the resolve of the Governments in Britain and India to uphold the partition as a settled fact. The author disowned his work. His only motive was to wash his hands clean of the ugly consequences of his own creation and establish his innocence. But the ex-Viceroy did not know that he, by his statement, had proved beyond doubt that the partition proposal was defective in its contents and therefore, wrong in its implementation.

Even if he doubted the way the measure was finally evolved and implemented, he insisted that the partition must be upheld with all determination and conviction in the interest of imperial prestige. He criticised the Liberal Government for its lukewarm support to partition. He blamed the late Prime Minister Campbell-Bannerman for his remark that the Government ‘are not unwilling to hear new facts or new arguments which might conceivably lead to a reconsideration of the case’. He blamed the pro-Indian Members in the House of Commons for creating a feeling that if persistent pressure was applied on the Government, it might yet yield on the issue. “I can only say,” he argued, “that any revocation or modification of the partition of Bengal—a measure accepted by two Secretaries of State, two

73. PP, Lords, Curzon, 30 June 1908,

Governments, two India Councils, of undoubted administrative advantage, inflicting injury upon no class or community, made a test case between the extremist party in India and the Government—could place a premium upon disloyal agitation in India in future, and render the Government of India well-nigh impossible; and future Secretaries of State would rue the day and would not forgive the man by whom that concession had been made.”<sup>74</sup>

Curzon’s stand that he was not responsible for partition, provoked bewildered Morley to expose how the ex-Viceroy was fully responsible for it. Morley replied:

“The noble Lord (Curzon) rather surprised me, and I am sure he surprised Lord Ampthill, when he said that he returned to India from his stay in England in 1904-5 and accepted without question what he found. I have been informed, and I believe rightly, that, while Lord Ampthill and Sir A. Fraser, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, were hammering out the final scheme of readjustment of boundaries, at every stage the noble Lord had communications made to him on every single particular from time to time.”<sup>75</sup>

Curzon protested. Morley demanded of Lord Ampthill, who was sitting behind Lord Curzon, to speak the truth. And Lord Ampthill rose to say:

“My Lords, I am reluctantly obliged to ask for your attention for a few minutes . . . My noble Friend (Curzon) gave me credit for a share in that act of statesmanship which is known as the partition of Bengal, and the noble Viscount the Secretary of State rather challenged me to say if that was so or not.

“My noble Friend (Curzon) has on more than one public occasion been very generous in giving me a share of credit—more than I have deserved—for acts of administration in which I bore a small part under his Government. I have been grateful on those occasions, and I have been, and always shall be, ready to share with him, so far as it is due, any responsibility which can properly be placed upon me. But I am bound

74. PP, Lords, Curzon, 30 June 1908.

75. PP, Lords, Morley, 30 June 1908.

to say, challenged as I am, that no share of the credit for the partition of Bengal is due to me . . . It was a policy for which I had no responsibility as regards the initiation, for the local governments were not taken into the confidence of the Viceroy in this matter when the policy was first devised.”<sup>76</sup>

Curzon stood exposed. The partition issue became more complex than before. The authorities were horrified at the attempts made on the lives of British officers. The anarchist societies alarmed them. It was said that the state of affairs in India had passed from calumny and misrepresentation to sedition, from sedition to crime, and from crime to bloody anarchy.

In a true sense the Indian National Congress had little to do with anarchical philosophies, not to speak of anarchical programmes. What worried the Congress was the repressive measures that the Government let loose on the people in the name of containing sedition and terrorism. The Explosive Substances Act (No. VI of 1908) was framed on the lines of the English Explosive Substances Act of 1883 for the express purpose of dealing with anarchist crimes. The Newspapers (Incitements to Offences) Act (No. VII of 1908) was passed ‘to make better provisions for the prevention of incitements to criminal outrages in newspapers’. The scope of the Act was confined to incitements to murders and to acts of violence. The government acquired power to confiscate the printing press used in the production of the newspaper, and to stop the publication of the newspaper. The two Acts were enforced extensively to deal with various anti-Government acts and to prosecute the offenders ‘many of whom belonged to the educated classes’.<sup>77</sup> During 1908 the editors of the *Kesari*, the *Swarajya*, the *Arunodaya*, and the *Rashtramukh*, and the two successive editors of both the *Kal* and the *Hind Swarajya* were prosecuted and sentenced for sedition. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the editor of the *Kesari* was sentenced to six years’ transportation. When the Congress assembled in

76. PP, Lords, Ampthill, 30 June 1908.

77. East-India (Progress and Conditions), 1908-9, Report on Crime and Police.

December 1908 in Madras, the leaders expressed concern over it. One of them, Ambika Charan Mazumdar, said:

“If anarchism has in every age and in every country failed to achieve the salvation of any people, repression has likewise nowhere succeeded in restoring peace and order, and in this country repression has so far only succeeded in converting prison houses into martyrdoms . . . If the partition is a settled fact, the unrest in India is also a settled fact and it is for Lord Morley and the Government of India to decide which should be unsettled to settle the question.”<sup>78</sup>

The Liberal Government was discussing at that time the question of Indian reforms. Chances of constitutional concessions appeared bright. Many in the Congress expressed general satisfaction with reform proposals. Even a resolution was passed in the Madras Congress of 1908 expressing sincere and grateful thanks to Lord Morley and Lord Minto for their efforts to initiate reforms.

But the same Congress passed the following resolution as well:

“That this Congress earnestly appeals to the Government of India and the Secretary of State for India to reverse the Partition of Bengal, or to modify it in such a manner as to keep the entire Bengali-speaking community under one and the same administration.”<sup>79</sup>

The Congress called upon the people to fully support the *Swadeshi* movement. It raised its voice against deportation of agitators and against such regulations as the Bengal Resolution III of 1818.

The year 1909 was the year of Morley-Minto Reforms. Known as the Indian Councils Act, 1909, it contained the principle of election of Members of Legislative Councils, in partial substitution for nomination, and the strength of the various Legislative Councils was greatly increased. The Liberal Secretary of State hoped that the Indian unrest would die down in the atmosphere of impending elections to Councils. The Congress indeed felt pacified for a little while

78. CC, A.C. Mazumdar, Twenty-fourth Congress, Madras, 1908.

79. INC, Resolution V, December 1908.

till it came to realise the evil aspects of the Reforms as embodied in communal electorates. But the Reforms did not put an end to anarchism. Repression, too, did not succeed in eradicating that phenomenon.

In England, in the summer of 1909, V.D. Savarkar was active in preaching among the Indian youth the terrorist gospel of 'the whole-sale murder of the English in India'. And, in England itself, there was a political murder. On 1 July 1909, William Curzon-Wyllie, the political Aide-de-Camp at the India Office, was assassinated by Madan Lal Dhingra. He was arrested on the spot and a piece of paper, found in his possession, contained the following:

"I attempted to shed English blood intentionally and of purpose, as an humble protest against the inhuman transportations and hangings of Indian youth . . .

"I believe that a nation unwillingly held down by foreign bayonets is in a perpetual state of war. Since open battle is rendered impossible I attacked by surprise—since cannon could not be had I drew forth and fired a revolver . . .

"The only lesson required in India is to learn how to die and the only way to teach it is by dying alone . . .

"It is my fervent prayer, may I be reborn of the same mother and may I redie in the same sacred cause, till my mission is done and she stands free for the good of humanity and to the glory of God."<sup>80</sup>

The murder of Curzon-Wyllie in England was considered a serious matter. Even the King was so angry that he wrote to the Viceroy: "Serious steps should be taken to prevent these young men coming over to England with no fixed occupation, and falling into bad hands which they invariably do. They only learn sedition and treason, which they infuse into the minds of their countrymen both in England and in India. What can one however expect if such a scoundrel as Keir Hardie, who is also a Member of the House of Commons, foments sedition in India and at home against our mode of Government? The harm he has done is incalculable—and

80. J.C. Ker, *Political Trouble in India, 1907-1917*, Confidential Report, 179-80.



makes one's blood boil."<sup>81</sup>

In India, bomb blasts and pistol shots continued to the utter alarm of the Government. An attempt was made to kill the Viceroy himself. On 13 November 1909, Lord and Lady Minto were on their way to see the old temples of Ahmedabad in an open carriage when a bomb was hurled at their carriage. The sergeant of the escort deflected the bomb with his sword. Another bomb struck the back of the carriage, and fell on sandy ground. Miraculously, they did not explode. The escape was described as 'a most wonderful escape from a dastardly outrage'. The Viceroy was stunned. He wrote to the King, "it is impossible to say how disastrous the results might have been."<sup>82</sup> The Secretary of State wrote to the Viceroy:

"I tremble to think of the horror and havoc that would have followed, if the villainy had succeeded. Apart from the personal and domestic result—truly miserable as that would have been—it would really, say what we will, have given for times to come a new and sinister cast to the British rule in India. Mayo's death was bad enough, but then it was single and isolated, whereas in this case the mischief would inevitably have been associated with the general movement in India. And, in spite of your magnanimous refusal to attach any political importance to the bombs, one cannot but feel that the miscreants who planned the outrage, were animated by politics, if one can give the name of politics to such folly and wickedness."<sup>83</sup>

Two days after the attempt on the Viceroy's life, the final scheme of Morley-Minto Reforms was published in India. The reforms were officially announced on 15 November 1909. The proposals did not appease the terrorists to any degree. On 21 December, the Collector of Nasik, Jackson, was shot dead by a Brahmin youth. The Viceroy thought it unfortunate that a political murder should have been committed when elections for the new Councils were smoothly under way. His hope for

81. MTP, Letters, H.M., no. 34, the King to Viceroy, 17 August 1909.

82. Ibid, no. 51, Minto to King, 19 November 1909.

83. MRP, Morley to Minto, vol. IV, 18 November 1909.

peace was further shattered when on the eve of the inauguration of the new Council of the Morley-Minto Reforms, anarchists killed Khan Bahadur Shamsul Alam, the deputy superintendent of police, Bengal Criminal Investigation Department. 'With the gloom of his assassination hanging over everyone', Lord Minto had 'to look after arrangements in the new Council room' and complete the draft of his speech for the opening ceremony.<sup>84</sup> And, on the day following the murder, on 25 January 1910, the Viceroy addressed the first meeting of the Reformed Council, saying: "A spirit hitherto unknown to India has come into existence, a spirit opposed to all the teachings of Indian religion and traditions, a spirit of anarchy and lawlessness which seeks to subvert not only British rule but the Governments of Indian Chiefs, to whom I am so deeply indebted for their loyal assistance."<sup>85</sup>

With the Reformed Council inaugurated, Lord Morley thought it necessary to show another gesture of liberalism. He directed the Viceroy to release the deportees. As he put it, deportation did not mean indefinite detention till the Day of Judgment. Lord Minto's argument was that drastic repressive measures should continue as long as murder-clubs remained and the Press continued to preach sedition. Morley was annoyed at the Viceroy's attitude, and he deputed an officer to rush to Minto with a private request to agree to release the deportees at once. He wrote: "This is the last letter that I shall inflict upon you in this matter, but I cannot budge from my case, and the clock has struck. After you have seen Adamson, please let me know whether you accede to my private request, or whether I shall be forced to official instruction."<sup>86</sup> It was an ultimatum from an imperious Secretary to a proud Viceroy. Minto yielded. In February 1910, the deportees were released, ending their ordeal since December 1908. The Viceroy tried to pocket the insult intelligently. He wanted to show that he was prompted in releasing the deportees by the political developments in England, and not

84. See MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. XVII, 27 January 1910.

85. MTP, M.1092, Viceroy's Speech at the first meeting of the Reformed Council, 25 January 1910.

86. MRP, Morley to Minto, vol. V, 27 January 1910.

by the opposition in India. He wrote to his boss:

“Ramsay MacDonald is reported to have said when in India that if the deportees were not released His Majesty’s Government would not get a single vote from the Labour Party, and it seemed to me, from what you have told me, that under such conditions a position might be created at home which would make it very difficult for you to support the Government of India—whilst if the Government of India should be overruled out of deference to political influences at home the effect in India would be most unfortunate on public grounds. So that I not only felt that release was right but that it would relieve us from very great difficulties ahead.”<sup>87</sup>

The Conservative Viceroy’s interpretation of the Liberal Government’s weakness at home came like a bitter dose of insult to the Liberal Secretary of State. He retorted:

“That is to say, I should not have overruled you because I think indefinite detention bad in Indian interests, as lowering Indian respect for British legality and strict regard for justice, but simply because I was afraid of being turned out of office by Labour men, plus radical stalwarts, plus Irish, plus a certain Tory contingent (don’t forget that part of our critics). Well, that you should think so ill of me as this, after more than four years’ experience of the constancy with which I have fought the battle of Indian Government here for you, against the most radical House of Commons that ever met, against the Palace, even against the Cabinet,—this, when we are on the eve of parting company, almost staggered me. I won’t prolong that wounding matter, lest I should fall into eloquence—and in my declining days I am beginning to suspect eloquence as rather a defect than a virtue or a gift.”<sup>88</sup>

Minto was unconvinced and wanted to pursue repressive measures as long as disturbances continued. He proposed to bring in martial law, when necessary, to crush the ‘manifestation of the spirit of murder’. “Martial Law, which is only a fine name for the suspension of all law, would not snuff out murder-clubs in India, any more than the same sort of thing

87. MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. XVII, 9 February 1910.

88. MRP, Morley to Minto, vol. V, 17 March, 1910.

snuffed them out in Italy, Russia, or Ireland," warned Morley.<sup>89</sup> The Liberal Government was worried about the Indian unrest which went on unabated in spite of Reforms. Many young men were locked up in prisons. Morley wanted to show a great gesture of mercy. When in May 1910 King Edward VII died and George V succeeded to the throne, he suggested to the Viceroy: "Would it be wise to do what Oriental monarchs have been wont to do on their accession—proclaim an amnesty?"<sup>90</sup> But the Viceroy was not inclined to do anything of that sort. And, the new King sent an advice to his Viceroy: "I trust that the anarchical spirit which still exists will gradually die out under firm Government."<sup>91</sup>

The Liberal Government proceeded to think of new policy matters in spite of the Viceroy. Morley, after the Reforms were passed and implemented, appeared like a spent bullet. He had, it appeared, nothing more to do for India. But the rising statesman for Indian affairs on the Liberal benches was the Under Secretary of State, Montagu. Many thinking people in Britain, in or outside politics, felt deeply concerned about India. Montagu assessed their fear and felt surprised—how much earnest thought and hasty judgment centred on the word 'unrest'! It was used by some, buttressed by instances of the inevitable friction of complex Government, as a proof of the failure of the British occupation! It was used by others, ornamented with details of crime statistics, as evidence of the lack of strength of British rule! Montagu asked the Commons:

"May I say how strange it seems to me that a progressive people like the English should be surprised at unrest! You welcome it in Persia, commend it enthusiastically in Turkey, patronise it in China and Japan, and are impatient of it in India!"<sup>92</sup>

The only assurance a worried Parliament had was that the British Government should learn to co-exist with the Indian unrest. But that should be not merely the co-existence of struggle and strength; but of demand and concession as well.

89. MRP, Morley to Minto, vol. V, 3 February 1910.

90. Ibid, 12 May 1910.

91. MTP, letters, HM, George V to Minto, no. 1, 2 June 1910.

92. PP, Commons, Montagu, 26 July 1910.

"True statesmanship, it seems to me," he said, "ought to be directed towards separating legitimate from illegitimate unrest. The permanent safeguard must be a sympathetic Government, which realises the elements of good as well as the elements of danger, and which suppresses criminal extravagances with inflexible sternness. His Majesty's Government, acting upon this principle, are determined to arm and to assist the Indian Government in its unflinching war against sedition and illegitimate manifestations of unrest, while it shows an increasingly sympathetic and encouraging attitude towards legitimate aspirations."<sup>93</sup> He warned the Commons:

"Let me only point out frankly some of the dangers that I think I see: first here in this House. Do not, on the one hand, oppose all agitation for reform because you are led astray to confuse it with seditious agitation. Do not use your murderer as an excuse for your conservatism."<sup>94</sup>

Perhaps for the benefit of Indian consumption, Montagu declared it sufficiently in advance, that is, in July 1910, that "Lord Minto, after a difficult reign is returning to England," and that "the new Viceroy, Sir Charles Hardinge, goes to India amid the almost universal welcome of those who recognise his high attainments and great qualifications."

The viceroyalty of the Conservative Minto ended on 23 November 1910. In that very month, Morley abdicated his Indian authority and Lord Crewe became the Secretary of State for India.

The new Viceroy Lord Hardinge reached Calcutta on 21 November 1910. Lord Minto left the Capital two days later. "During those two days," writes Hardinge, "I had long talks with many Indians, and I began to feel that if only the trials for sedition then in progress, could be finished and set aside there might be some hope of peace. Curzon's policy of the partition of Bengal, to which the unrest was chiefly due, was severely criticised on all sides, but in those days I never held out the very slightest hope of the reversal of that policy."<sup>95</sup> Within the next two days, the Secretary of State,

93. PP, Commons, Montagu, 26 July 1910.

94. Ibid.

95. Lord Hardinge, *My Indian Years*, 11.

at the request of William Wedderburn who was on his way to India to preside over the forthcoming Congress session at Allahabad, advised the new Viceroy to show a gesture of goodwill towards the Congress in particular and to adopt a less repressive policy towards the nationalists in general. Crewe wrote: "It is asked that the Viceroy should receive the Congress Resolutions. Provided that they are couched in respectful terms and are not sequel to any violent or seditious proceedings in the Congress, I cannot conceive any reason why they should not be formally received, as was formerly done by Lansdowne and others . . . Sir W. Wedderburn asks that he may not be shadowed by police during the Congress . . . Wedderburn's other requests were (1) that there might be a truce on house-searchings and prosecutions. (2) That there should be an amnesty for political offenders. (3) He finally spoke of Partition, and asked for the reunion of the two Bengals, with Bihar, Assam and Orissa under Chief Commissioners. Not practical politics, of course . . ."<sup>96</sup> Crewe regarded Wedderburn as a man of high hopes and good intentions, but less practical than most of his race.\*

The Viceroy accepted the advice in good spirit. He knew Wedderburn well and decided to receive him well. He assured the Secretary of State: "I think that the indiscriminate house-searchings that have taken place of late have tended to exasperate moderate people, and they must be stopped. There is nothing that is so much disliked in an Oriental country where women are kept in seclusion . . . As regards prosecution, I have also spoken freely to my Council and deprecate the net being thrown so wide; as for example, in the Howrah Gang Case, where 47 persons are being prosecuted, of whom only 1 is, I believe, the real criminal."<sup>97</sup> But, regarding the central theme of the time, Hardinge said: "As for the revival of the question of partition, we must regard that, as Lord

<sup>96</sup> HP, Earl of Crewe to Hardinge, 25 November 1910.

\* "Morley has always liked him, and I fancy regarded him as the fairest exponent of the extreme British creed on Indian matters," said Crewe.

<sup>97</sup> HP, Hardinge to Crewe, 15 December 1910,

Morley said, as a closed chapter.”<sup>98</sup>

When Wedderburn reached India and announced his intention of coming to Calcutta after the Congress to present the Congress Resolutions to the Viceroy, Hardinge agreed to the proposal but told him that “he would be wise to drop all mention of the partition of Bengal, since Lord Morley has already declared this question to be a closed book.”<sup>99</sup>

The Congress of December 1910 passed off ‘peacefully and harmlessly’ and President Wedderburn’s remarks read very well. The Viceroy received a deputation of the Congress and cautiously enough replied to them ‘in many words which practically told nothing more than the establishment of the reformed Councils has taken the place of the National Congress’. “Of course,” noted Hardinge, “they will not be satisfied with what I said in my speech, but there is nothing in it that they can catch hold of. Wedderburn is coming to lunch with me today, and I intend to tell him that his Congress will lose caste if they do not dissociate themselves from the language of Sir Henry Cotton, one of their former Presidents.”<sup>100</sup>

The Indian Press was very pleased that the Viceroy received the deputation of the National Congress and it also appreciated the terms of his reply. A new atmosphere of understanding seemed to have come into existence at that time. In view of the decision of the King-Emperor to hold an Imperial Durbar in India in a year’s time, peace was very desirable.

That spoke of the faith of the Indian leaders in British statesmanship. That a Liberal Viceroy had taken over and that the King, too, was coming to the country created hopes among them that something big would follow. And, the only big hope at that time was the revocation of the partition of Bengal. Lord Hardinge was not a great Viceroy like Curzon. Nor was he a shrewd man like Minto. But he wanted to be a good Governor-General like Ripon. With his fingers on the

98. HP, Hardinge to Crewe, 15 December 1910,

99. *Ibid*, 22 December 1910.

100. *Ibid*, 5 January 1911,

pulse of the people, he proceeded to face the unrest like a statesman.

One of his first tasks was to deal with the prosecutions for sedition, most of which had been initiated 'through the short-sightedness of the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Edward Baker' of Bengal whom the new Viceroy called 'my Bengal tiger'. In a short time many prosecutions were withdrawn.\*

The Liberal Government in Britain moved rather swiftly. In January 1911, hardly two months after the arrival of Lord Hardinge in India, the Secretary of State wrote to the Viceroy about the possibility of a modification of the partition of Bengal. He further suggested that the announcement of that important subject should be made by the King in the Durbar. The Viceroy naturally consulted several top British officers, most of whom had strong objections to it. Hardinge, therefore, thought it impracticable, and Crewe did not press. The King's proposed visit to India was nevertheless announced promptly. In February 1911 the King announced: "It is My intention, when the solemnity of My Coronation has been celebrated, to revisit My Indian Dominions, and there to hold an Assemblage in order to make known in person to My

Though Lord Hardinge was obliged to take a soft attitude towards many nationalists, his attitude towards Tilak remained tough. By August 1911, he had suggestions from the Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald to release Tilak on parole for the remainder of his sentence. Against that he wrote to the Secretary of State:

"Six months of the sentence of two years passed on him after the murders in 1897 were remitted on condition of his being of good behaviour. In a short time he was at his old tricks. After sailing as close to the wind as he dared for some years and devoting all his energies to the organisation of a movement for the overthrow of British rule, he at last crossed the line in 1909 and was again convicted. If he had been left at liberty for another year or two, he would have perfected his arrangements for a general strike in Bombay, the consequences of which would have been very serious. Tilak is much more than a mere newspaper editor. He is a great organiser and is the most dangerous—I might also say the only dangerous man in India. It would be a fatal mistake to release him before the end of his term."

HP, Hardinge to Crewe, 17 August 1911,



subjects My succession to the Imperial Crown of India.”<sup>101</sup>

The Viceroy felt convinced within a short time that “if there was to be peace in the two Bengals it was absolutely necessary to do something to remove what was regarded by all Bengalis as an act of flagrant injustice without justification. There was at the same time a feeling of expectancy abroad that something would be done at the time of the Durbar to remove this injustice, and I appreciated the fact that if nothing were done we would have to be prepared for even more serious trouble in the future . . .”<sup>102</sup> When the Viceroy started thinking of a plan of rectification, John Jenkins, the Home Member of the Viceroy’s Council, emphasised on the urgency of the transfer of the British Indian capital from Calcutta to Delhi. Hardinge finally drafted a top secret memorandum on the following points: (a) The transfer of the capital from Calcutta to Delhi, (b) The creation of United Bengal into a presidency with a Governor in Council appointed from England, (c) The creation of Bihar and Orissa into a Lieutenant-Governorship with a Legislative Council and a capital at Patna, and (d) The restoration of the Chief Commissionership of Assam. The members of the Viceroy’s Council were made to agree to the new policy, and on 19 July 1911 the Viceroy sent his scheme in detail to the Secretary of State. He advocated its acceptance as ‘the best and only certain means of securing peace and reconciliation’. The whole scheme was to be kept in extreme secrecy. On 7 August, the Secretary of State gave a green signal to the Viceroy to go ahead. In a telegram, he conveyed his ‘entire support’.

Lord Crewe thought it necessary first to ascertain the King’s opinion. The latter agreed, and showed interest in making the announcement himself at the Durbar. The King also advised complete secrecy. Thereafter, Lord Crewe disclosed the matter to Lord Morley and Asquith. They, too, approved of the proposed measures in the broader interest of the British rule.

Though speculation was rife in India that something

101. PP, Lords, The King’s Speech, 6 February 1911.

102. Lord Hardinge, *My Indian Years, 1910-1916*, 36-37,

big was to be announced by the King-Emperor, the scheme to unsettle the partition was never disclosed. It is said that the scheme was known to only twelve persons in India who kept it a top secret for full six months. In England, the scheme was known only to the members of the India Council and the Cabinet and they kept it to themselves till the end.

It is surprising that the Conservative leaders in England could not anticipate these developments. King George V did not confide in any one of them though the undoing of partition was to be the destruction of a Conservative edifice. The Liberal Prime Minister, too, did not think it necessary to consult the leader of the opposition. Lord Curzon, of all persons, could not think for a moment that the British Government would bow down before the agitators in India.

King George V left England for India on 9 November. On 7 December 1911 he made the state entry into Delhi. Delhi was not at that time the capital of India. The King and the Queen, the Viceroy and the provincial Governors, and the ruling chiefs of India were all lodged in camps, set up over a huge area of 20 square miles. "It was a marvellous sight and there were no less than a quarter of a million people living under canvas who had to be fed and provided with all the necessaries of life for which the resources of the City of Delhi were quite inadequate since its population was also only a quarter of a million," wrote Hardinge.<sup>103</sup> The Delhi Durbar was indeed a costly affair. But no other Durbar had created so much of expectation as this one in December 1911.

The hour of the great announcement drew nearer. The scheme, as the Viceroy felt, was 'one of the best-kept secrets in history'. The copies of the announcements were printed in a 'mystery camp' only at the last moment. They were to be distributed in sealed covers only after the King had delivered his speech. And, the King made his announcement. It was a Durbar in which there were 4,000 special guests, 70,000 spectators, and 35,000 troops. The announcement "came like a bombshell. At the first moment there was a deep silence of profound surprise, followed in a few seconds by a wild burst of cheering . . . For the next few days there was

103, Lord Hardinge, *My Indian years, 1910-1916*, 48,

no other subject of discussion in the camp, while the Indian Press was full of it.”<sup>104</sup>

On 12 December 1911, within a few hours of the King’s announcement at the Delhi Durbar, Viscount Morley stood up in the House of Lords as the Lord President of the Council to announce that great plan. Morley read out that portion of His Majesty’s speech which contained the following:

“We are pleased to announce to our people that on the advice of our Ministers, tendered after consultation with our Governor-General in Council, we have decided upon the transfer of the seat of the Government of India from Calcutta to the ancient capital of Delhi; and simultaneously, and as a consequence of that transfer, the creation at as early a date as possible of a Governorship for the Presidency of Bengal, of a new Lieutenant-Governorship in Council for Behar, Chota Nagpur, and Orissa; and, finally, of a Chief Commissionership of Assam, with such administrative changes as may by-and-by be found necessary.”<sup>105</sup>

The Lord President of the Council commended it to ‘the attention and consideration of the Sovereign Parliament’. But what consideration could Parliament bestow upon it except to give its approval to the measure already accomplished? The King’s announcement was intelligently worded. It aimed to mean that the two halves of Bengal were being united as the capital of British India was being shifted from Bengal’s capital Calcutta to India’s traditional capital Delhi. But, in reality, it meant that the settled fact of partition had been unsettled because of the Indian unrest.

The Conservatives in Parliament could not restrain themselves. More than the merit of the issue was the manner in which it was done. It was the Marquis of Lansdowne who began the attack. “My Lords,” he said, “I doubt whether this House has ever listened to a more important statement than that which has just fallen from the lips of the noble Viscount opposite . . . These proposals involve an abrupt reversal of the policy initiated by my noble friend behind me (Lord

104. Lord Hardinge, *My Indian Years, 1910-1916*, 52.

105. PP, Lords, Lord Morley, 12 December 1911,

Curzon), accepted by his successor in the Viceroyalty, accepted by the late Government, and continued by the Government which is now in power.

“But, my Lords, what makes these proposals really of quite exceptional importance is the fact that they are to be connected with the personal intervention of the sovereign. That is a very serious matter indeed. These new departures, which I can only characterise as of the utmost gravity, will, unless I am mistaken, provoke in India every variety of feeling, ranging from great elation to great disappointment, and from the highest hopes to serious mortification.”<sup>106</sup>

Lansdowne described how helpless was the House to enter upon a critical examination of the matter at that moment. Nothing which the House could say or do could alter what had been announced by His Majesty that morning. The word of the King-Emperor had been spoken and that word was irrevocable.

To Lord Curzon, the changes announced were so startling and so tremendous in significance and consequence, and involved so abrupt a departure from the traditional and accepted policy of the Government of India during the past century or more, that they demanded the closest attention and the most minute scrutiny.<sup>107</sup> Since the King was still in the Durbar when Parliament was being informed of his announcement, it appeared inappropriate to speak on the subject at that very moment, and hence Curzon and his colleagues reserved their right to speak again at a later date.

The Durbar of Delhi dispersed, and on 16 December, the King left his tent for a tour of some places like Nepal. On 30 December, he reached Calcutta. That very week the Indian National Congress had met in Calcutta (26-28 December). Ramsay MacDonald, the Labour leader and a future Prime Minister of Britain was to have presided over that session. But the unexpected and untimely death of his wife prevented him from coming to India. It was the general feeling that Ramsay MacDonald's presence as President of the Congress in that

106. PP, Lords, Marquis of Lansdowne, 12 December 1911,

107. PP, Lords, Curzon, 12 December 1911.

momentous year would have made it a happy occasion indeed. In his absence, Bishen Narayan Dar took the presidential chair.

It goes without saying that the King's announcement had made the Congress immensely happy. It was the victory of a cause for which the Congress had fought for years. It was said that the cause of Bengal was the cause of all India, and its triumph marked the triumph of the claims of justice over those of prestige. Praising the Viceroy, the Chairman of the Reception Committee said: "Lord Hardinge, that statesman, lonely and serene, . . . who saw the wrong and did the right."<sup>108</sup> The Congress President declared:

"The victory is due to the heroic courage of self-sacrifice of those selfless and patriotic leaders who, through all the storm that raged round them and the clouds of sorrow and suffering that darkened their path,

"Saw the distant gates of Eden gleam, and did not dream it was a dream,

" . . . but retained their undying faith in their cause and an immovable trust in British justice, have at last succeeded in the most momentous constitutional struggle of modern India, and have thereby set an inspiring example to the whole nation."<sup>109</sup>

The Congress also welcomed the transfer of the political capital of India from Calcutta to Delhi. Delhi was described as the eternal city of Hindustan, associated with the most glorious and romantic memories of old times. "And great and noble as are the monuments of her past splendour, yet greater and nobler monuments will arise, not to dim but to add to that splendour by associating it with the bounty and beneficence of one of the noblest Sovereigns that historic India has ever known."<sup>110</sup>

The King was praised, and so too the Viceroy. The constitutional struggle was praised, and no wonder the Congress was congratulating itself. But what about the martyrs

108. CC, *The Twenty-Sixth Congress*, Chairman, Reception Committee, December 1911.

109. INC, Presidential Address, 26th Congress, Calcutta, December 1911,

110. *Ibid*,

who had fallen outside the ambit of peaceful agitation? What about the extremists who shook the foundation of a mighty empire? The cautious President, in subtle words, spoke the following:

“Our agitation in order to be effective must be national, not sectarian, persistent not spasmodic, directed by intelligence and wisdom and not impulsive and reckless. Enthusiasm is good, and idealism is good, and even crying for the moon is sometimes good; and I for one sympathise with those who are called visionaries and dreamers; for I know that in every active and reforming body there is always an extreme wing that is not without its uses in great human movements. I know that moderation sometimes means indifference and cautious timidity, and I hold that India needs bold and enthusiastic characters—not men of pale hopes and middling expectations, but courageous natures, fanatics in the cause of their country—

Whose breath is agitation,  
And whose life a storm whereon  
they ride.”<sup>111</sup>

The Congress dispersed amidst expression of profound gratitude to His Majesty for ‘modifying the partition of Bengal’.<sup>112</sup> Within a week, the King held in Calcutta a Proclamation Parade. Nearly a million people witnessed that celebration.

The King returned home. On 14 February 1912, the following speech of the King was presented to Parliament. “In My Indian Dominions, the Durbar which I held with the Queen-Empress, at Delhi, in order to make known in person My succession to the Imperial Crown of India, has furnished Me with overwhelming proof of the devotion of the Princes, Nobles, and Peoples of My Indian Empire to Ourselves and of their loyalty to My rule. In the great cities of Calcutta and Bombay the spontaneous manifestations of an enthusiastic affection and loyalty with which We were received by all classes of citizens touched us most deeply.”<sup>113</sup> As the House

111. INC, Presidential Address, 26th Congress, Calcutta, December 1911.

112. INC, Resolution II, Calcutta, 1911.

113. PP, Lords, King’s Speech, 14 February 1912.

of Lords began to debate on the address, the Conservative Lansdowne, rather in a sarcastic tone, wanted to know if "the success of the Royal visit was to be attributed mainly or even in part to the historic announcement made by His Majesty on the occasion of his visit to Delhi."<sup>114</sup> Lord Crewe, the Secretary of State, gave this interesting reply:

"We all know what divinity hedges a King, particularly in an Oriental country, where he is regarded as representing a special manifestation of the Divine essence and character."<sup>115</sup>

Lord Curzon was preparing in the meantime his most powerful attack on the Liberal Government. On 21 February 1912 he made a very long speech in the House of Lords to denounce all that had been done to reverse the partition of Bengal. To him, the issues involved were not those of moving the capital from Calcutta to Delhi and of redefining the boundaries of provinces, but something which affected the British rule in India for all time. "It is no secret, my Lords," emphasised Curzon, "that we were all taken by surprise. My noble friend Lord Lansdowne and myself . . . had been jointly responsible for the Government of India for a period of twelve years, though there were other ex-Viceroy in this country who had been similarly responsible for another ten years, though our joint knowledge of India and our responsibility for its Government in the highest place had thus covered a period of twenty-two years, I believe I am right in saying that not one of us had been consulted in advance or had the slightest inkling of what was going to be done."<sup>116</sup>

Curzon attacked Hardinge too, for the revocation of partition which was on the initiative of that Viceroy who was in India only for a few months. And, he had done it without any reference to those officers who had been responsible for the Government of India for a period of nearly a quarter of a century. But Curzon's main thrust was on the constitutional impropriety of the whole case. He said:

"It would not be right that even in India the personal authority of the Sovereign should be engaged to relieve his

114. PP, Lords, Lansdowne, 14 February 1912.

115. PP, Lords, Crewe, 14 February 1912.

116. PP, Lords, Curzon, 21 February 1912.

Ministers of the responsibility which is theirs, to supersede Parliament, which is the governing authority as regards India and every portion of His Majesty's Dominions, or to shut the mouths of public men. For surely it is clear that if you once accept the principle that great political and administrative changes can be introduced in India by the *fiat* of the Sovereign, even on the occasion of his Coronation, without challenge, you impair and weaken the constitutional machinery which we have set up in this country and which we regard as the guarantee of our liberties. You set up an autocracy which is not the more tolerable, but the less tolerable because the Ministers who really exercise it shelter themselves behind the person of the Sovereign."<sup>117</sup>

In fact, the Liberal Government had ignored the Opposition party till the Royal announcement, and when the Opposition was at last given a chance to criticise, time had passed to make any criticism in any way effective. Rather, the Opposition was placed in an embarrassing position since the discussion involved the Sovereign.

It was considered by the Conservatives as a new procedure in the history of the British rule in India because till then no major change was brought about in that empire without a full discussion in Parliament followed by a sanction of both Houses. Since the days of the Pitt's India Act of 1784 to Lord Beaconsfield's Royal Titles Act of 1876, that was the procedure and hence a convention in British system. Even as late as 1909, the Government of India Act passed through the same procedure. But, only two years later, in 1911, for the first time, a great measure was effected without the hall-mark of Parliamentary approval.

There was yet another point. The partition of Bengal was one of the most controversial issues of that time. Opinion was sharply divided both in England and India. To take a decision on a controversial matter through the Sovereign and not Parliament, was unconstitutional.

Curzon referred to Indian reaction to the announcement and it appeared to him as the most dangerous part of the

117. PP, Lords, Curzon, 21 February 1912.



entire episode. "Directly after the announcement was made at Delhi," said Curzon, "the Congress Committee met and passed a vote of thanks to the Government for the fulfilment of their political aspirations; and subsequently, at the meeting of the Congress, the President spoke of the annulment of partition as a triumph in the most momentous constitutional struggle in modern times. Not in any part of India is there any doubt that agitation has won the day . . . If you declare a measure to be a settled fact and instruct your officials so to inform the people, and if then, six years later, you turn round and throw to the winds what you have said, can you be surprised that this is regarded on your part as an exhibition of weakness or that it is thought and said that agitation has won the day?"<sup>118</sup>

Curzon remained bitterly opposed to what he considered a victory of the Indian Congress over the British power. Lord Crewe, the Liberal Secretary of State, had one potential argument to rebutt Curzon that the partition was acknowledged by all as a mistake. "I think," he said, "it will be shared by all who recall it that the various noble Lords who were, or might have been, concerned in the carrying out of that partition, including the noble Earl himself (Curzon), were, if I may use a common expression, almost tumbling over each other in their readiness to deny that what they called the credit of it ought to be claimed by them."<sup>119</sup>

Lord Minto, by then ex-Viceroy, was already in the Lords. Curzon's partition of Bengal had become law before he arrived in India. And, he had to deal with the aftermath—"the aftermath of unrest, dangerous unrest—that followed in its wake". Minto's entire regime was devoted to suppressing that unrest. "I can assure your Lordships," he declared, "that when I left India the agitation against partition was stone dead." Thereafter, following the line of Curzon, Minto argued:

"Throughout my term of office the Government of India warmly supported Lord Curzon's policy in the Bengals. We

118. PP, Lords, Curzon, 21 February 1912.

119. PP, Lords, Crewe, 21 February 1912.

were told from home that 'partition' was a 'settled fact' . . . I should think there is scarcely a civil servant in India who has not declared that it would be impossible for any British Government to reverse the decision it had come to. Only last summer during the Coronation festivities I was approached by a distinguished Bengali leader, who asked if, in view of the King's visit to India, there was no possibility of a reversal of Lord Curzon's partition, and I told him that no Government of India could ever entertain the idea of such a thing. And now the declarations of the Government of India . . . have been disowned . . . Such a policy can but depreciate the reputation of British rule in India."<sup>120</sup>

The more sober-minded Lords pointed out that it was by rectifying a mistake that the stability of the empire was better assured than by sticking to it. References were made to past mistakes and the resultant dangers. Lord MacDonnell described how Lord Dalhousie's Doctrine of Lapse was a great blunder. "In that mistake Lord Dalhousie sowed the wind, or helped to sow it, and the Empire reaped the whirlwind in the Mutiny." "The last mistake," he said, "and I say it with deep respect—is the mistake of the noble Earl (Curzon), which would have had immeasurably worse consequences . . . had it not been corrected in time."<sup>121</sup> Lord Ampthill, so closely associated with the partition policy, struck a note of understanding to blunt the controversy.

"The people of India have assented—I might say cheerfully assented—to the changes which have been announced, and it is their opinion which really matters. The privileges of Parliament cannot, in my humble judgment, be weighed for one moment against the contentment of India in a case so unique, so impossible of constituting a precedent for the ordinary governance of India, as this one . . . I confess that I admire the courage of those who made themselves responsible for this new policy, for it was a courageous act."<sup>122</sup>

The matter ended there. Between the will of Parliament

120. PP, Lords, Minto, 22 February 1912.

121. PP, Lords, MacDonnell, 22 February 1912.

122. PP, Lords, Ampthill, 22 February 1912.

and of the people, the latter proved stronger and more efficacious. Between revolution and repression, the former appeared more effective. India understood the value of agitation. The Congress felt jubilant that success could be wrested. What about the British? They learnt the lesson of courage in acknowledging a defeat.

But, the strength of the national movement has, in the meantime, been counter-balanced by the injection of communal considerations into the body politic of India. The problem of the Indian Muslims had become a problem for Parliament and also the Congress.

## National Congress vis-a-vis Anglo-Muhammedan Rapprochement

THE struggle between the Indian National Congress and the British Parliament represented, in its abstract aspect, a struggle between the forces of indigenous nationalism and alien imperialism. The English people, though divided on the surface by well-demarcated political ideologies, were fully united in many matters of their national existence, especially, as far as the imperial interests were concerned. The story of the Indian nationalism, however, was not that simple as of British imperialism. In its subcontinental dimension, India contained many races, religions, and languages. The forces of nationalism, therefore, had to cut across many boundaries to superimpose the essentials of national unity on this diversity. The process was, naturally, difficult and complex. Education, political consciousness, patriotism, economic discontent, hatred of the foreigner, and similar other factors brought the elite together to make a common cause in the name of Indian nationality. But, to the vast majority of people, traditional socio-religious distinctions remained as clear as ever before. This was very much so in the 19th century.

And no distinction was more deep and enduring in the historical setting of India as between the Hindus and the Muslims as two separate communities.

That distinction was primarily religious, and secondarily

social, but rarely political. In the days of the great Mughals, Emperor Akbar and Rana Partap fought bitter battles; but Akbar's general in the battles against the Rana was a Hindu, Man Singh. Even the redoubtable Aurangzeb depended on his Hindu employees to administer his vast empire. His religious dogmatism did not colour his politico-administrative outlook. It was his Rajput generals who fought against the Maratha, Sivaji. Kings fought kings with soldiers belonging to both the communities arrayed in their respective armies. In brief, the Muslim theological state could not exclude the Hindus either from the administrative services or from army, and the Hindus, in turn, did their best to serve the Muslim state which employed them. The Deccanese Sultans regarded the Hindus as the major source of support to their political structure, though disliking them on religious grounds. In the Muslim era politics could not have been conducted by bracketing religious and political differences together. Even at the end of that era, in the battlefield of Plassey, a Hindu general, Mohanlal was fighting heroically on the side of his Muslim master, while a Muslim, Mir Jafar, was playing the role of a traitor to weaken the Muslim nawab against Robert Clive.

Finally, in the days of the Mutiny of 1857 Hindus and Muslims stood shoulder to shoulder to fight and fall together.

The pioneers of the Indian national movement hoped to develop political nationalism to secure political ends irrespective of religious differences. In an age of rationality, enlightenment, and socio-religious reform movements, they wanted to keep religion strictly at a personal level, and away from political principles. But history moved on its own precarious course. The growth of nationalism came to be subjected to dialectical inevitability and attracted its antithesis in the form of communalism, the sponsors of which made use of religion as an instrument of contemporary politics. Its far-reaching consequences were seen in the last days of the British Raj.

The concept of Muslim separatism posed for the Congress the most serious internal problem. For Parliament in general, and to the governments in particular, Muslim separatism could not be excluded from general political or national develop-

ments. Ultimately the problem of Indian Muslims served as a *modus operandi* for the ruling class in justifying many of their political attitudes.

Much has been said regarding the British involvement in Muslim communalism during the nationalist era. Perhaps it will be wrong to say that the British were primarily responsible for the origin of separatism. But it will be equally wrong to say that they did not encourage separatism to its bitter length from where there could be no return. The facts narrate the sequence of events.

As the Revolt of 1857 was being ruthlessly suppressed the fury of the British was directed as severely against the Hindus as against the Muslims since, both in leadership and in following, the Mutiny marked a combined effort of both the communities to bring down the foreign rule. The brutal treatment meted out to the descendants of the last Mughal Emperor was only a manifestation of the English wrath on Muhammedan community. At that moment of Indian history, there was no question of British sympathy for or softness towards Indian Muslims. A rapprochement was not necessary at that time.

Within three years of the Rising of 1857 the most serious consideration regarding the future of the Indian Muslims was being paid by a Muslim leader who may be appropriately regarded as the greatest Indian Muslim after Bahadur Shah, II and before Muhammad Ali Jinnah. He was Syed Ahmed Khan. It was the British hostility towards the Muslims which inspired him to evolve a course of thought and action to defend the latter from further trouble. For many atrocities committed during the Mutiny, the Government blamed the Muhammedans and punished them severely. To Syed Ahmed, the really guilty were not his fellow religionists, but the Hindus. Neglected by Government and sinking into abject misery, the Indian Muslims at that time were indeed in a pitiable condition. Syed Ahmed lamented their fate in the words of an oriental poet: 'There was no misfortune sent from Heaven, which ere it descended to earth, did not seek for its resting place the dwellings of Mohamedans!'

He was an attentive reader of contemporary newspapers,

Several works which came out on the events of 1857 did not escape his close observation. He felt shocked to discover how the Muslims were described as vile, treacherous and contemptible. He, for one, condemned those Muslims who had behaved without a sense of duty and joined in the Rebellion. He described them as criminals, and their conduct inexcusable. In that momentous crisis, he felt, it was the imperative duty of the Muhammedans, "a duty enjoined by the precepts of our religion, to identify themselves heartily with the Christians, and to espouse their cause; seeing that they have,—like ourselves,—been favoured with a revelation from Heaven, and believe in the Prophets, and hold sacred the word of God in his holy book, which is also an object of faith with us."<sup>1</sup> Here was the beginning of a new religious approach to the Indian social scene, the drawing together of Muslims and Christians as partners in a holy cause against the pagan Hindus. Nothing could have proved more potential an idea than religious affinities between the race which ruled a little earlier and the race which ruled at the moment to forge unity against the rebellious Hindus as their common foe. "Where the blood of Christians was spilt," wrote Sir Syed, "there should also have mingled with it that of Mohomedans; and those who shrunk from manifesting such devotedness, and sided with the rebels, wilfully disobeyed the injunctions of religion besides proving themselves ungrateful to their salt and thereby incurring the severe displeasure of Government, a fact that is patent to every peasant."<sup>2</sup>

The thesis which Syed Ahmed Khan worked out in 1860, describing his community as the *Loyal Mohomedans of India*, was the foundation on which stood future Anglo-Muhammedan rapport and rapprochement. He held out for the consumption of the British that if ever in Hindoostan there was one class of people above another, who, from habits and associations, and from kindred disposition, were fast bound with a Christian Government, those people were the Muhammedans, and Muhammedans alone. He called upon his community to

1. SD, 173-75, Syed Ahmed Khan on the Muslims and the Mutiny, 1860,

2. Ibid,

remain loyal to the British and take advantage of the many benedictions of the British rule.

The British, from their side, took some time to understand the value of the Muslim community in the general interest of their rule. The empire was being reshaped under the direct rule of the Crown. The new tide of Indian consciousness was slowly but surely manifesting itself. British scholarship, of need, penetrated into Indian sociological problems to ascertain the attitudes of different sections of Indian people. In the seventies, William Wilson Hunter made a thorough study of the Indian Muhammedans and discovered the latent causes of their discontent. "A hundred and seventy years ago," wrote Hunter in 1871, "it was almost impossible for a well-born Musalman in Bengal to become poor; at present it is almost impossible for him to continue (to be) rich."<sup>3</sup> The Muhammedans were no longer the conquerors or rulers, no longer revenue collectors or officers. Their sources of wealth had long since dried up. Without appointments in army, administration, revenue services, and civil employments, the Muslim aristocracy slid into ruin. Everywhere Hindus were seen to have come out in numbers and filled up different grades of official life. "How comes it that the Muhammedan population is thus shut out alike from official employ and from the recognised professions?" Hunter asked, and answered: "The truth is, that our system of public instruction, which has awakened the Hindus from the sleep of centuries, and quickened their inert masses with some of the noble impulses of a nation, is opposed to the traditions, unsuited to the requirements, and hateful to the religion, of the Musalmans."<sup>4</sup> Hunter's work on *The Indian Musalmans* was an eye-opener to a select few who thought of the lot of that community from social, economic, and educational angles. Education, at the bottom, was spreading rapidly through the vernacular languages of the country which the Muslims despised. They hated the Hindu teachers who imparted that education. The schools

3. SD, 175, William Hunter on the Causes of the Muslim Discontent, 1871.

4. SD, Ibid, 175-78,



did not recognise Persian or Arabic languages, and the system of public instruction made no provision for the religious education of the Muslim pupils. To the 'illiterate and fanatical peasantry' these conditions were unacceptable.

While Hunter made an academic study of the condition of the Muhammedans, Syed Ahmed Khan initiated a practical approach to the mental isolationism of his great community. He thought of an educational system to suit the needs of the time and foster the educational growth of future generations. "The old Muhammedan books," felt Syed Ahmed, "and the tone of their writings do not teach the followers of Islam independence of thought, perspecuity, and simplicity; nor do they enable them to arrive at the truth of matters in general; on the contrary, they deceive and teach men to veil their meaning, to embellish their speech with fine words, to describe things wrongly and in irrelevant terms, to flatter with false praise, to live in a state of bondage, to puff themselves up with pride, haughtiness, vanity and self-conceit, to hate their fellow creatures, to have no sympathy with them, to speak with exaggeration, to leave the history of the past uncertain, and to relate facts like tales and stories. All these things are quite unsuited to the present age and to the spirit of the time, and thus instead of doing any good they do much harm to the Muhammadans."<sup>5</sup> Through a new system of education, Sir Syed wanted to teach his fellow religionists to aspire for high positions in Government service, to enjoy a share in the management of the country, to gain honour and respect in the world, and to do good to their fellowmen. His dreams were to come true in due course.

On 8 January 1877, Lord Lytton, the Governor General, laid the foundation-stone of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh. It was said about this college that for the first time in the history of Indian Muslims a college owed its establishment to the combined wishes and the united efforts of a whole community. The founders of the college regarded the British rule in India as 'the most wonderful phenomenon the world has ever seen' and wanted 'to reconcile oriental

5, SD, 178-80, Syed Ahmed Khan on Muslim Education, 1872,

learning with Western literature and science; to inspire in the dreamy minds of the people of the East the practical energy which belongs to those of the West; to make the Mussulmans of India worthy and useful subjects of the British Crown; to inspire in them that loyalty which springs, not from servile submission to a foreign rule, but from genuine appreciation of the blessings of good government'.<sup>6</sup>

Aligarh became not merely a place for Muhammedan Anglo-Oriental learning, but also a centre of a new political ideology to further Muhammedan interests. The leaders of the Aligarh school of thought, right from the beginning, projected their policies for safeguarding the interests of the Muslim community. In other words, their line of approach encouraged directly and indirectly political separatism within the broader framework of national politics. For example, when the principle of local self-government dominated the mind of the politically conscious, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan virulently attacked it with communal arguments. "The system of representation by election," he declared in 1883, "means the representation of the views and interest of the majority of the population, and, in countries where the population is composed of one race and one creed, it is no doubt the best system that can be adopted. But, my Lord, in a country like India, where caste distinctions still flourish, where there is no fusion of the various races, where religious distinctions are still violent, where education in its modern sense has not made an equal or proportionate progress among all sections of the population, I am convinced that the introduction of the principle of election, pure and simple, for representation of various interests on the local boards and the district councils, would be attended with evils of greater significance than purely economic considerations."<sup>7</sup> He warned the Government that the larger community would completely override the interests of the smaller community, and the Government would be held responsible for the violent racial

6. SD, 183-84, see Muslim Address to Lord Lytton, 8 January 1877.

7. Proceedings of the Indian Legislative Council, Syed Ahmed Khan on Local Self-Government Bill, 12 January 1883,

differences which would inevitably follow. The Muslim leaders drew the attention of the Government to the disadvantaged positions of their community; they showed how Hindus had ousted Muhammedans from the state employ in general, and prayed for state patronage. In brief, the highest quarters of Muhammedan aristocracy had started having suspicion about the rising Hindu influence in spheres of administration and education.

At its birth, the Indian National Congress came to represent a national political consciousness *par excellence*, and the organisation, by assuming a permanent character with many political programmes, became a concern of all. To the conscious Muhammedans, the Congress presented a veritable problem, whether to join or not to join it. Before the birth of the Congress, the National Muhammedan Association was more or less the mouthpiece of the advanced sections of Muhammedans, and, in 1882, that body was negotiating with the Government regarding the improvement of the conditions of the Muslim people. It was to this body that the Congress appeared a phenomenon to reckon with. Before the Congress met in its second session in Calcutta in the last days of December 1886, Amir Ali, the honorary secretary of the Central National Muhammedan Association wrote a letter to the Secretaries to the National Congress explaining why the Association should abstain from participating in the proposed Congress.<sup>8</sup> It was the beginning of a parochial tendency from the side of the largest religious minority of India towards a national organisation which wanted to be all comprehensive, but, which, by circumstances, was bound to represent to a larger degree the feelings and aspirations of the preponderant majority, namely, the Hindus.

It is interesting to note how keenly did the British observe the Muslim attitude towards the Congress right from the initial stage of the Congress-Muslim relations. Lord Dufferin, the ruling Viceroy who refrained himself from making any comments on the Congress at that time, at once directed his private secretary to inform the private secretary to the

8. The letter of Amir Ali was dated 12 December 1886,

Secretary of State how "the most advanced section of the Mahommedans declines to join in the political agitation." A copy of Amir Ali's letter to the Congress was sent for the perusal of the Secretary of State.<sup>9</sup> When the Congress was in session in Calcutta, and Muhammedan unwillingness to join it came to the knowledge of the Viceroy, his private secretary wrote to London: "Last week I sent you the reply of the Mahommedan National Association to the Secretary of the so-called National Congress declining to take part in the proceedings which are at this moment taking place in Calcutta. I now send you, by the Viceroy's orders, for the information of the Secretary of State, copy of a similar reply by the Mahommedan Literary Society. This latter society represents those Bengal Mussulmans who wish to adopt English education and European customs only in so far as they can be adopted without contravening the essential principles of Islam."<sup>10</sup> Both politically and religiously, the Muhammedan Literary Society was more conservative in its outlook than the National Association.

The Muslim apathy towards the National Congress, both from progressive and conservative sections, did cause concern to the founding-fathers of that organisation, though, they did not consider it either as final or likely to endanger the national cause. After all, those were the inceptive days of a great party. It needed time for all sections to come in to its fold.

It is difficult to ascertain if there were any among the ruling Englishmen of that time capable of influencing the Muslim attitude against the Congress movement in the interest of the ruling race. 1885-86 was too early to work in that direction. But, a letter written by the Viceroy Dufferin just after the Calcutta Congress shows that even though no attempts were made to keep the Muslims away from the Congress, the idea of such a political separation was considered neither remote nor impractical. If the Viceroy thought such an attempt as dangerous, there might have been others to

9. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/5, D. Mackenzie Wallace, Private Secretary to Viceroy to W.J. Maitland, Private Secretary to Secretary of State, 21 December 1886.

10. Ibid, Wallace to Maitland, 28 December 1886,

regard it as desirable. This is what Lord Dufferin wrote to Lord Cross: "You will have observed that the Mahommedans have abstained from taking any part in the Indian National Congress. They have done this, I understand, entirely in accordance with their own views of what is politic, and not at all under any pressure from the officials. Indeed I do not think we could make a greater mistake than to endeavour to sow the seeds of dissension, suspicion, or jealousy between any classes of Her Majesty's subjects. Such a policy would in the long run recoil upon our own heads."<sup>11</sup>

The National Congress made a Muslim, Budrudin Tyabji, its third President in Madras in 1887. It was evidence of the national character of the Congress organisation. "Gentlemen," said Budrudin Tyabji, "it has been urged in derogation of our character, as a representative national gathering, that one great and important community—the Mussalman community—has kept aloof from the proceedings of the two last Congresses . . . Gentlemen, it is undoubtedly true that each one of our great Indian communities has its own peculiar social, moral, educational and even political difficulties to surmount—but so far as general political questions affecting the whole of India—such as those which alone are discussed by this Congress—are concerned, I for one am utterly at a loss to understand why Mussulmans should not work shoulder to shoulder with their fellow-countrymen, of other races and creeds, for the common benefit of all."<sup>12</sup>

Tyabji and the Congress adopted a practical line for national concord by avoiding issues with socio-religious tints. For example, the third Congress had before it a resolution calling for a ban on cow-slaughter; this created a lot of difficulty for the Congress leaders in view of the fact that the resolution would undoubtedly displease the entire Muslim population. So, the leadership found a solution, which was accepted by all communities, and which became thereafter a recognised convention of the Congress, namely, that 'if any

11. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/8 A & B, Dufferin to Lord Cross, 4 January 1887.

12. BML, 8023 aa 45, Third Congress, Madras, Address of Budrudin Tyabji, December 1887,

resolution affecting a particular class or community, was objected to by the delegates representing that class or community, even if they were in a minority, it should not be considered by the Congress'.<sup>13</sup>

While Budrudin Tyabji and others were exploring possibilities of Hindu-Muslim unity to strengthen the foundation of the National Congress, there were others to oppose the ideas of unity by more powerful arguments. Exactly at the moment when Tyabji was appealing to Muslims to join the national stream, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was explaining to the people how the political demands of the Congress would endanger the Muslims. Referring to elective principles in the Indian context, he said: "We can prove by mathematics that there will be four votes for the Hindu to every one vote for the Mahomedan. And how can the Mahomedan guard his interests? It would be like a game of dice, in which one man had four dice and the other only one . . . Now, I ask you, O Mahomedans! Weep at your condition! Have you such wealth that you can compete with the Hindus? . . . Now, I ask you to pardon me for saying something which I say with a sore heart. In the whole nation there is no person who is equal to the Hindus in fitness for the work."<sup>14</sup>

Sir Syed went farther. It was not the principles of election which worried him, but the future fate of Indian Muslims in case the Congress movement gained momentum and captured power. In a speech at Meerut on 14 March 1888, he made this famous statement: "Now, suppose that all the English and the whole English army were to leave India, taking with them all their cannon and their splendid weapons and everything, then who would be rulers of India? Is it possible that under these circumstances two nations—the Mahomedans and the Hindus—could sit on the same throne and remain equal in power? Most certainly not. It is necessary that one of them should conquer the other and thrust it down . . . When it has been settled that the English Govern-

13. CC, Third Congress, Madras, 1887, Features.

14. SD, 187-88, Syed Ahmed Khan and the National Congress, Speech at Lucknow, 28 December 1887.

ment is necessary, then it is useful for India that its rule should be established on the firmest possible basis . . . Therefore the method we ought to adopt is this, that we should hold ourselves aloof from this political uproar and reflect on our condition.”<sup>15</sup>

Thus, within three years of the birth of the Congress, the Muslim opinion was polarised, one section seeking unity of the nation for a common cause, and the other toying with the idea of two Indian nations, Hindu and Muslim. This polarisation continued to persist till the end of the *Raj*, in spite of many attempts on the part of the Congress to avoid the possible consequences inherent in the acceptance of the two-nation theory by the Indian Musalmans.

For the British too, it was equally a development of considerable significance, to be fruitfully utilised according to the needs of the time. Lord Dufferin was fully aware of the Muslim attitude towards the Congress. He did not want to exploit the racial differences, but by officially taking note of the differences, he served the purpose of the anti-Congress officials to whom any opposition to the Congress from any quarter appeared highly desirable. Before his departure from India, Dufferin expressed his views on the subject in the following manner:

“I confess I would rather see the Europeans, Hindus, and Mahomedans united in criticising the Government than that the Hindus and the Mahomedans, the Europeans and the Natives, should become estranged from each other by unworthy prejudices, or animosities of race and religion. God forbid that the British Government should ever seek to maintain its rule in India by fomenting race hatreds amongst its subjects.”<sup>16</sup>

The politics of India thus took a triangular shape with the three arms being the Congress, the British and the Muslims. These three sides, while lengthening or shortening under pressure of events, could not till the last dislocate themselves

15. SD, 188-89, Syed Ahmed Khan's Speech at Meerut, 14 March 1888.

16. DC, Mss. Eur. F 130/11 A, Reply of Earl Dufferin to Addresses, 23 March 1888.

from the points of their meeting. In their triangular relations, as time advanced, the Congress came to suspect the British for adopting a policy of *divide et impera*, and criticised the Muslim separatists for their harmful role. Even before Lord Dufferin left India, the Congress Press criticised the Viceroy for his policy towards the Muslims. "I think," wrote Dufferin to Cross, "I mentioned to you in a recent letter that the extreme section of the Radical Press in this country, not knowing what to do in their rage at the opposition which has been offered to the Congress by the Mahomedans and many of the higher of the Hindu classes, have resorted to the absurd device of attributing the split to my Machiavelian cunning . . . The most that I have done has been to express my sympathy with their (Mahomedans) backward condition, and to exhort them, by the education of the rising generation, to pull themselves up to a level with their Hindu competitors."<sup>17</sup> If the Viceroy came under criticism, so did Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. Pherozeshah Mehta drew the attention of the Congress to the great disservice which Sir Syed was doing to the country by 'preaching a gospel of selfishness and isolation'.<sup>18</sup>

At the popular level, it was not the prospects of introduction of elective principles which widened the gulf between the Congress sympathisers and the Muslim leadership, but the day to day life in which the two communities found themselves socially divided. And the most potential of those factors was the question of the food habit of the Muhammedans which to every Hindu appeared abominable. To the common Hindu, cow-slaughter was religiously wrong, and to the enlightened Hindu it was economically harmful. But to every Muslim, the cow was merely a usual item of food. It is this non-political issue which directly and indirectly influenced the political relations to a very large extent. Riots over cow-slaughter leading to communal bitterness kept political atmosphere tense. In 1893, when a riot broke out in Bombay, and the Hindus agitated against cow-slaughter, Lord Lansdowne

17. DC, Mss. Eur. 130/11 B, Dufferin to Cross, 29 October 1888.

18. BML, 8023 aa 45, Sixth Congress, Address of Pherozeshah Mehta, 1890.



interpreted it in political terms. "The more I see of this agitation," wrote the Viceroy to the Secretary of State, "the more serious does it seem to me. The advanced wing of the Congress Party, which is profoundly disloyal to us, has found in this fanatical and popular movement a means of establishing a connection between itself and the great mass of the Hindu population. The Home Rule agitation did not become really formidable until Parnell had taken up the agrarian question. The subterranean connection which has now been established between Congress and the Cow will, unless I am mistaken, convert the former from a foolish debating Society into a real political power, backed by the most dangerous elements in Native society."<sup>19</sup>

The Secretary of State also, after collecting information about the cow-slaughter riots, formed an opinion of his own about their political impact. He was of the view that "this movement makes all combination of the Hindoos and Mahomedans impossible and so cuts at the root of the Congress agitation for the formation of a united Indian people, who are to force us to surrender power into their hands."<sup>20</sup>

The cow thus appeared to have become an instrument of politics. The Congress Muslims, however, were worried about the instinctive aloofness of their community from a national organisation which wanted to serve useful purpose for all. In 1896, the Congress President, Rahimtulla M. Mohammad Sayani, a prominent Muslim nationalist of the time, tried to trace the more fundamental causes of Muslim negativism towards the Congress. According to him, some persons imagined that all, or almost all the Musalmans of India were against the Congress movement. But the fact was that the mass of the Muslim population did not know what the Congress movement was all about. Lack of education and consciousness, coupled with their traditional apathy towards larger affairs of the country, made them indifferent towards the Congress. According to Sayani, the following beliefs kept the Musalmans away from the Congress.

19. BML, LP, B.P. 7/17, Lansdowne to Kimberley, 22 August 1893.

20. Ibid, Kimberley to Lansdowne, 25 August 1893.

(1) That it was against their religion to join the Congress, as by joining the Congress they would be joining the Hindus who were not Musalmans. (2) That it was against their religion to join the Congress, as by joining the Congress they would be joining a movement opposed to Government, a thing which was opposed to their religion, which enjoined obedience and loyalty to Government, even if Government might not be treating them properly. (3) That it was against their religion to learn the English language. (4) That the success of the Congress would weaken the British rule, and might eventually end in the overthrow of British Power and the substitution by Hindu Rule. (5) That the Government was against the Congress movement; that in addition to the dictates of loyalty, the Musalmans owed gratitude to Government for giving them a liberal education; therefore by joining the Congress, the Musalmans would be committing the sin of ingratitude towards Government. (6) That the Congress did not adequately represent all the races of India. (7) That the motives of the persons constituting the Congress were not honest. . . (10) That the modes of Government prevailing in the West, namely, examination, representation, and election, were not suitable to India. (11) That such modes were not adapted to Musalmans. (12) That the result of the application of Western methods to India would be to place all offices under Government in the power of the Hindus, and the Musalmans would be completely ousted from Government employment . . . (15) That in as much as the Congress was a representative body, and in as much as the Hindus formed the majority of the population, the Congress would necessarily be swamped by the Hindus, and the resolutions of the Congress would, to all intents and purposes, be the resolutions of the Hindus, and the Musalmans' voice would be drowned, and, therefore, if the Musalmans joined the Congress they would not be heard, but would be actually assisting in supporting Hindus to pass resolutions against the interests of the Musalmans, and to give colour to such resolutions as the resolutions of Hindus and Musalmans combined, and thus aiding in passing resolutions against themselves and misleading Government into believing

that the Musalmans were in favour of such resolutions.<sup>21</sup>

These and many other arguments dominated the Muslim mind which it was impossible for either the Congress or the Congress Muslims like Sayani to change. As this attitude continued to persist, it became a direct proof of the validity of the traditional thesis held and elaborated by the administration that "India is not a single country with a homogeneous population. India is, in truth, a congeries of countries, with widely differing physical characteristics. It contains a number of peoples, speaking many languages, holding many creeds, observing different customs, and enjoying divergent degrees of civilisation."<sup>22</sup> The complex national character of India ultimately boiled down to a simple equation when the administration discovered the two major communities adopting an uncompromising stance. It is the Hindu-Muslim relations which became a weapon in the hands of the administration to challenge the concept of Indian unity in days to come.

Lord Curzon, soon after his arrival in India, found it convenient to acknowledge the greatness of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and call upon the Muslims to follow his ideals. "The service of such men," he told the Muhammedans at Lahore, "the pioneers of their generation, is, however, by no means confined to their lifetime. A great and noble work has in itself a vitality independent of and greater than that of its creator; and while the visible spark of æthereal flame that flickers in the mortal body is soon quenched and dies, its transmitted essence continues to burn brightly in the living products of human genius and imagination. It behoves the Muhommedans of the Punjab to carry on the work which was inaugurated by their departed leader, and to give to it the permanence and durability which will be the most fitting monument to his memory."<sup>23</sup> Lord Curzon bitterly hated the Bengali babus and by Bengali babus he meant the Bengali Hindus. Parenthetically, he developed a soft corner towards

21. BML, 8023 aa 45, Twelfth Congress, see Address of R.M. Sayani; Calcutta, 1896.

22. See East India (Progress & Condition), Report for the year 1893-94.

23. HC, Mss. Eur. D 510/1, Curzon's speech to Muhammedans at Lahore, 5 April 1899.

the Musalmans in general and the Bengali Muslims in particular. The thought of putting the Muslims against the Hindus was not his original idea. It was an old concept. For example, a decade before Curzon's arrival, Sir John Strachey had written: "The truth plainly is that the existence side by side of these hostile creeds is one of the strong points in our political position in India. The better classes of Mohammedans are already a source to us of strength and not of weakness, and a continuously wise policy might, I believe, make them strong and important supporters of our power. They constitute a small but energetic minority of the population, whose political interests are identical with ours, and who, under no conceivable circumstances, would prefer Hindu dominion to our own."<sup>24</sup> Curzon decided to put that theory into practice. While looking at the Muslim population of Bengal in course of his tour in 1904, he announced at Dacca how his concept of a Muslim majority province "would invest the Muhammedans in Eastern Bengal with a unity which they have not enjoyed since the days of the old Mussulman Viceroys and Kings."<sup>25</sup>

Thus came his partition of Bengal. The creation of a Muslim majority province was a bold step which only Curzon could have taken, of course, unmindful of the consequences. Unfortunately, he had to leave India before the consequences took an alarming shape. It was left for Curzon's successor, Lord Minto, to face the situation (see Chapter 5).

It was during those hectic days of Indian politics, when the *Swadeshi* movement flared up as a reaction to the partition that there speedily evolved between the British administrators and Muslim leaders an *entente cordiale* which, through ups and downs, continued till the partition of India. Curzon's lieutenant in the new province, Fuller, quickly made the Muslims aware that the new province was created for their benefit and consequently, by early months of 1906, a Muslim separatist campaign took shape against the anti-partition

24. Sir John Strachey, *India* (London, 1888), 225.

25. P. Mukherji, *All about Partition*, Curzon's Speech at Dacca, 18 February 1904.

movement of the Bengalees. While the Congress and the nationalists aimed at winning the Muslim sympathy against partition, the Eastern Bengal bureaucracy led by Fuller tried to wean away the Muslims to stand by the partition. The Muslim leadership consequently stood divided, and common people were for the time subjected to pulls and pressures from opposite sides. As a result of the political rivalry, dangerous communal doctrines got mingled with economic issues of that poverty stricken province. Muslim share-croppers took courage to raise their voice against Hindu land proprietors, and even refused to work for them. A communal pamphlet named *Nawab Saheber Subichar* (The Justice of Nawab Saheb of Dacca) was circulated among the fanatical sections of the Muslim people. The socio-economic differences, coupled with the new political situation, culminated in serious communal disturbances in Eastern Bengal. A pamphlet entitled *Lal Istahar* added to this fanatical atmosphere by calling upon the Muslims to boycott the Hindus in every respect.

Lord Minto, who had inherited the policies of Lord Curzon, looked upon the Muslim grievances against the Hindus and against the Congress-led *Swadeshi* movement as a source of help in upholding the government policies against the nationalist agitation. He viewed the Bengal situation in the larger context of all-India politics. The Hindu elite was part of an organised movement, while a good portion of the Muslim elite still remained loyal to the British rule. The Congress agitation in favour of a boycott of the British goods was not acceptable to Muslims in general, and the Bengal Muslims in particular. Since the agitation was more severe in Bengal because of the anti-partition movement there, and because of the growing Muslim consciousness in Eastern Bengal in favour of partition, the Muslims in that new province began to bitterly resent the *Swadeshi* call and the boycott. Fuller saw that insults were being hurled at Muhammedans, and that 'illegal boycotting and the picketing of shops were in active progress and were causing loss to the Muhammedans which was greatly resented by them'. These observations were duly reported to the higher authorities. The Viceroy at the same time, learnt from Fraser that the Congress leaders of the agitation were trying their best 'to secure, or

parade, Muhammedan support'.<sup>26</sup> On the basis of reports from his subordinates, Minto reported home that "it is only the Hindu population which have taken an active part in the movement, and which constitutes the political voice of the province."<sup>27</sup> There were no doubt a good number of Muslims supported the anti-partition movement, but they were described in bureaucratic circles as people who were 'in the pay of the *Swadeshi* Party'. Minto's consistent policy throughout his regime was not to pay attention to the Muslims who were either with the Congress or were active in the agitation to undo the Bengal partition.

In the larger interests of the British empire, Lord Minto decided to follow a policy of active appeasement of the Indian Muslims. He was aware of a general consensus among the Muslims that they had not been given as much share in public employment as was their right or as they were qualified. Everywhere the Hindus dominated in government services, even in predominantly Muslim districts like Eastern Bengal. The Government felt that "such exclusiveness while it is unfair to candidates of other classes is most mischievous and detrimental to Government interests and to the interests of the public, especially where, as in this province (Eastern Bengal) the excluded class is the most numerous, and therefore has the larger number of dealings with the offices. It is a matter therefore of essential importance that in the interests of fairness and efficiency decided measures should be taken to put an end to this abuse."<sup>28</sup> For twenty years since 1885, there were instructions for proportionate representation to the Muhammedans in Government services, but on account of Muslim apathy towards English education they were not able to compete with the Hindus in securing a good number of government jobs. A generation had nearly passed since then, and it was now thought necessary to reverse the situation. Fuller in the meantime had fallen from power. But his successor, Hare, sought the Viceroy's permission to issue a public circular about

26. MTP, Correspondence, vol. I, no. 64, Fraser to Minto, 2 February 1906.

27. MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. I, 5 February 1906.

28. MTP, Correspondence, vol. II, see no, 5221 C, 25 May 1906.

'the great disproportion between Mohammedans and Hindus employed in public offices'. He also instructed his subordinates to take necessary steps to correct the imbalance. Minto accepted the suggestion as sound, but did not go as far as to offer employment to Muslims by publicly upholding their cause. "The Mohammedans are no doubt very much under-represented," he felt, "but still I feel sure it would be a mistake to show any appearance of playing off Mohammedans against Hindus. The machinery to put things right is in existence, and it is only necessary quietly to draw attention to it, so I stopped the circular."<sup>29</sup> With instruction from the Viceroy, Hare opened the gates of Government services to the Muslims without of course making any official statement in that regard. But, however secret or cautious was the move, the keen Hindu mind in that era of agitation allowed nothing to pass unnoticed and, therefore, the leaders severely criticised the Government policy of winning over the Muslims by offering jobs. The Muslims, on the other hand, appreciated the Government gesture in offering their young men places and positions in various services.

That the Viceroy wanted the Hindu-Muslim antagonism to grow was accepted as a patent fact. Fuller was doing his best to keep Muslims from Hindus politically separate. When he was sacked for his excesses, his Muhammedan supporters took it as a defeat of their cause. When this episode sharpened the hostility between the two communities, Lord Minto wrote in satisfaction: "The Mohammedan agitation over Fuller's resignation will, I am sure, do good, as long as it does not get out of hand. It is evidence of feeling which the noisy Bengali movement has kept in the background . . ."<sup>30</sup> Fuller's policy of 'playing off the two sections of the population against each other' (it was Fuller's successor Hare who reported this secretly to the Viceroy) continued to gain ground under the tacit acknowledgement of Minto. The Hindus' known suspicion about the Government attitude did not alarm the Viceroy even though it worried many of his senior administrators like

29. MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. IV, 19 December 1906.

30. Ibid, vol. III, 29 August 1906,

Lieutenant Governor Fraser of Bengal. Hindus of all sections spoke of the same—'Government officers are stirring up Muhammedans in Eastern Bengal against Hindus'. "Even educated and loyal men believe this," reported Fraser to Minto, "and what of the common people? It is deplorable."<sup>31</sup>

The Viceroy was not only unmoved by the Hindu criticism, but tried to assure the home authorities that a pro-Muslim policy was the only counter-force against the Congress movement against partition. He comforted the Liberal Secretary of State: "I have always had great hopes of the Mohammedan population. They have not Bengali gifts of eloquence, and comparatively one hears little of them. But . . . now that they are becoming somewhat alarmed at what they consider Bengali successes, the justice of our safeguarding their interests will become all the more apparent, and ought to be of real assistance to us in dealing with much of the one-sided agitation we have to face."<sup>32</sup> Minto took extra precaution to show that the Government had no intention of encouraging communal differences since the differences were already there because of economic factors. "The agriculturist is chiefly Mohammedan," he argued, "the Hindu is the large landed proprietor, there has been the constant friction as to the payment of rent, and a good deal of absentee landlordism."

Pro-Government Muslims in Eastern Bengal began to take part in the politics of the new province with a communal approach towards every issue. They began to blame the Hindu leaders for spreading sedition in the country; they criticised the Liberal Cabinet and particularly the Secretary of State for the timid policy which helped the Hindu agitation while harming Muslim interests; and they also criticised the Government of India for not being too firm against the agitation. They expressed surprise as to how the Hindus were permitted to openly defy the Government, and how the Government at the same time remained indifferent towards the interests of the Muslim community in spite of its professed loyalty.

31. MTP, Correspondence, 1907, vol. I, no. 256, Fraser to Minto, 28 May 1907.

32. MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. III, 15 August 1906,



The Hindu nationalists on their part first tried to persuade and then pressed upon the Muslims to join the anti-Government agitation. When they did not succeed, they identified the leading Muslim landlords of the area and began to boycott them socially. Similarly, the Muslim peasants who did not actively join the agitation, were subjected to various difficulties by their Hindu landlords.

This mutual hostility led to the inevitable result. In their bitterness towards each other, the Hindus and Muslims began to indulge in communal riots.

The Liberal Government in England, soon after assuming power, thought of pacifying Indian opinion by granting some constitutional concessions. Lord Curzon had left a difficult legacy which called for a change in policy. The *Swadeshi* movement had created a crisis which could neither be evaded nor brushed aside. It was only the granting of constitutional reforms which would pacify the majority of the Congress people. When Lord Morley began to think of the reforms, he obviously meant legislative institutions through election, while Lord Minto thought of consolidating the British power through constitutional reforms based on communal considerations.

It is in this perspective that there occurred two events of great future consequence. They were the Simla Deputation and the birth of the All-India Muslim League. These were the concrete results of the developing Anglo-Muhammedan rapprochement at that time spearheaded by the Aligarh leaders and the conservative Viceroy, Lord Minto.

Soon after his arrival in India, Minto was told by the National Mohammedan Association that their legitimate aspiration for the well-being of the Musalmans could come only through constitutional means. In due course, he made himself personally committed to the task of political regeneration of the Muslim community. When early in August 1906 John Morley gave an indication of the coming Indian reforms in the House of Commons, it took both Minto and the Muhammedans by surprise as far as the likely contents of such innovation. "I do not say," Morley had announced, "that I agree with all that the Congress desires, but, speaking broadly of what I conceive to be at the bottom of the Congress, I do

not see why any one who takes a cool and steady view of Indian Government should be frightened.”<sup>33</sup> As soon as an inkling of his thought leaked out, Mohsin-ul-Mulk, the manager of the Aligarh College and the leader of the Aligarh thought, wrote from Bombay the following note to the English principal of the College, Mr. Archbold:

“You must have read and thought over Mr. John Morley’s speech on the Indian Budget. It is very much talked of among the Mohammedans of India, and is commonly believed to be a great success achieved by the National Congress.

“You are aware that the Mohammedans already feel a little disappointed, and young educated Mohammedans seem to have a sympathy for the Congress; and this speech will produce a greater tendency in them to join the Congress. Although there is little reason to believe that any Mohammedans, except the young educated ones, will join that body, there is still a general complaint on their part that we (the Aligarh people) take no part in politics, and do not safeguard the political rights of Mohammedans; they say that we do not suggest any plans for preserving their rights, and practically do nothing and care nothing for the Mohammedans beyond asking for funds to help the College. I have got several letters drawing attention particularly to the new proposal of ‘elected representatives’ in the Legislative Councils. They say that the existing rules confer no rights on Mohammedans, and no Mohammedans get into the Councils by election; every now and then Government nominates a stray Mohammedan or two by kindness, not however on the ground of his ability, but of his position, who is neither fit to discharge his duties in the Council, nor is he considered a true representative of his community. If the new rules now to be drawn up introduce ‘election’ on a more extended scale, the Mohammedans will hardly get a seat, while Hindus will carry off the palm by dint of their majority, and no Mohammedan will get into the Councils by election . . .

“I feel it is a very important matter, and, if we remain silent, I am afraid, people will leave us to go their own way

33. Morley’s Indian Speeches, August 1906.

and act up to their own personal opinions.

“Will you therefore inform me if it would be advisable to submit a memorial from the Mohammedans to the Viceroy, and to request His Excellency’s permission for a deputation to wait on His Excellency to submit the views of Mohammedans on the matter?”<sup>34</sup>

Archbold was the link between the Aligarh leaders and Minto’s secretariat. Mohsin-ul-Mulk depended on the ‘valuable advice’ of the principal as well as on his initiative and guidance in that very important matter.

Within four days, this important letter to Archbold was in the hands of the Viceroy then staying at distant Simla. On that very day, 8 August 1906, Minto sent a copy of it to Morley, with the following suggestions:

“We have not as yet got the full reports of your Budget speech . . . But the telegraphic accounts have excited a good deal of interest, and I think it is worthwhile to enclose you a copy of a letter to Mr. Archbold, Principal of the Aligarh College, from Mohsin-ul-Mulk, the Manager of the College. It was only put before me today and is important as illustrating the trend of Muhammedan thought, and the apprehension that Mohammedan interests may be neglected in dealing with any increase of representation on the Legislative Councils. I have not had time to think over the advisability of receiving the proposed deputation, but am inclined to do so. There have been other signs besides the letter to Mr. Archbold pointing in the same direction, and there is no doubt a natural fear in many quarters lest perpetual Bengalee demands should lead to the neglect of other claims to representation throughout India; so that we must be very careful in taking up these questions to give full value to the importance of other interests besides those so largely represented by the Congress. Unfortunately it is the voice of the Congress leaders that makes itself so generally heard, and any attempt to further any increase of representation which, however justly, may recognise other claims than those put forward by them, will meet with no

34. MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. III, Enclosure, Mohsin-ul-Mulk to Archbold, 4 August 1906,

favour from their hands.’’<sup>35</sup>

The alacrity with which Minto took up the Muslim cause reflected his deep interest in the subject. And, the promptness with which the Muslim Deputation was organised, reveals the real motive of the parties concerned. Principal Archbold was near at hand at Simla to lend his services. Dunlop Smith, the private secretary to the Viceroy, was readily available to lend him his support. Archbold's correspondence showed how he played the key role in organising the deputation, in advising Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk what to do and what not to do, in taking appropriate steps to bring the already agitated Dacca Muslims into the picture, to inform the Muslim leaders privately that their deputation would be received well, and in bringing in together representative Muhamedans from various parts of India, and finally, in advising the leaders in advance about the petition. He requested the Viceroy through his private secretary to deliver to the deputation a 'reassuring statement'. "From my knowledge of those who would lead (the deputation)," he said, "I am sure that nothing in the slightest degree disloyal or objectionable would be brought forward. There is no wish on the part of the Mohammedans to give trouble to the Government in any way . . ."<sup>36</sup>

On 10 August 1906, Archbold received the green signal that 'His Excellency will agree to receive the Deputation'. On 15 August, the Viceroy wrote to the Secretary of State: "I have always had great hopes of the Mohammedan population . . . and now that they are becoming somewhat alarmed at what they consider Bengali successes, the justice of our safeguarding their interests will become all the more apparent, and ought to be of real assistance to us in dealing with much of the one-sided agitation we have to face."<sup>37</sup> In the meantime Archbold had drawn up the required 'Formal Request' for the Muslims and they were going to get it signed.<sup>38</sup> When Mohsin-

35. MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. III, 8 August 1906.

36. MTP, Correspondence, vol. II, no. 40, Archbold to Dunlop Smith, 9 August 1906.

37. MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. III, 15 August 1906.

38. MTP, Correspondence, vol. II, no. 50, see Archbold to Dunlop Smith, 20 August 1906,

ul-Mulk got the document in Bombay he wrote back to Archbold on 18 August:

"Thanks for your letter of the 14th instant together with a draft of the formal application. I am sending it to a few of my friends, but I am sure nobody will like the opening phrases which give an assurance of a deliberate aloofness from political agitation in the future. Probably also they will not like me to represent their cause to Government without the means of a political association."<sup>39</sup> Archbold at once assured Mohsin-ul-Mulk that he had no objection to incorporating an indirect reference in the "Formal Request" to the need of a political association on behalf of the Muslims.

"Archbold offered even to proceed to Eastern Bengal in connection with the proposed deputation. But the Viceroy did not think it necessary for him to take such 'heroic measures'. Instead, he sent all papers and copies of letters from Archbold and Mohsin-ul-Mulk etc., to L. Hare, the Lieutenant-Governor of Eastern Bengal, and sought his opinion on the proposed Muslim deputation. Hare sent a long reply. He advised the Central Government to tell the deputation that the Government had no intention whatsoever of neglecting or overlooking Muhammedan interests. But he posed a question: "Whether the Government of India can accept the Mohammedans who address them . . . as representative of the feeling and opinions of the Mohammedans generally," and proceeded to describe his experience that it was only the political agitators who were recognised as people's representatives and not the loyal supporters of the Government. Hindus, in that sense, made themselves heard through opinions expressed in political meetings, while the Muslims went unheard because of their non-political character. Hare was critical of the Liberals at home who gave undue importance to Congress agitators. "If," he wrote, "the Home Government will not accept the assurance that these representative Mohammedans do truly represent Mohammedan opinion, so far as any opinion has been formed at all, then I think the Mohammedans will decide that they

39. MTP, Correspondence, vol. II, Enclosure, Mohsin-ul-Mulk to Archbold, 18 August 1906.

must organise meetings to voice Mohammedan opinion. They can do it . . . Mr. Morley may ask, do these Mohammedan representatives really represent Mohammedan opinion? I answer most certainly they do. The Hindu papers may talk of the three Tailors of Tooley Street, and no doubt in Eastern Bengal Mohammedan leaders of position and distinction are few; but unless these leaders go counter to the Moulavies, which would only be in some religious or quasi-religious question, the Mohammedans will follow their leaders without question, and to a man almost. As a matter of fact, all political agitation must be engineered.”<sup>40</sup>

After the composition and character of the Muslim deputation had been ascertained, and the contents of their memorial known, the Viceroy informed the Secretary of State on 10 September 1906 that he was going to receive the deputation on 1 October. Morley wished him success a week before the appointed date. “Your talk to the Mahometans next Monday,” he said, “will become the centre of Indian interest. I am looking forward to it pretty keenly, as you may guess—with perfect assurance that you will hold sound and straight forward language.”<sup>41</sup>

So, at last, on the heights of Simla, a great historical event took place. On 1 October 1906, at 11 A.M., the Muslim Deputation, consisting of thirty-five members and led by His Highness the Aga Khan, met the Viceroy in the Viceregal Palace, and presented their Address.

“May it please Your Excellency,” read the Aga Khan, “Availing ourselves of the permission accorded to us, we the undersigned Nobles, Jagirdars, Taluqdars, Lawyers, Zamin-dars, Merchants and others, representing a large body of the Mahomedan subjects of His Majesty the King-Emperor in different parts of India, beg most respectfully to approach Your Excellency with the following address for your favourable consideration.”<sup>42</sup>

40. MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. III, Enclosures, Hare to Dunlop Smith, 1 September 1906.

41. MRP, Morley to Minto, vol. I, 26 September 1906.

42. MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. III, The Muslim Deputation and Address, 1 October 1906.

The Address referred to the many benefits conferred by British rule on teeming millions belonging to diverse races and religions, to the peace, security, personal freedom and liberty of worship that the people enjoyed, and to the wise and enlightened character of the Government. It drew the attention of the Viceroy to the fact that the Muhammedans of India, according to the census of 1901, numbered over sixty-two million, that was, between one-fifth and one-fourth of the total population. And, it presented its final point:

“We, therefore, desire to submit that under any system of representation extended or limited, a community in itself more numerous than the entire population of any first class European Power, except Russia, may justly lay claim to adequate recognition as an important factor in the state. We venture, indeed, with Your Excellency’s permission, to go a step further, and urge that the position accorded to the Mahomedan community in any kind of Representation, Direct or Indirect, and in all other ways affecting their status and influence, should be commensurate, not merely with their political strength, but also with their political importance and the value of the contribution which they make to the defence of the Empire; and we also hope that Your Excellency will, in this connection, be pleased to give due consideration to the position which they occupied in India, a little more than a hundred years ago, and of which the traditions have naturally not faded from their minds.”<sup>43</sup>

The new electoral bodies, it was pointed out, were unlikely to favour Muslim candidates, unless they were in sympathy with the Hindu majority in all matters of importance. And, the Hindus, by virtue of their numerical strength, were in an advantageous position to elect the members of their own community or those non-Hindus who were known to side them.

The Address of the Deputation, so it was claimed, contained the clear wishes of the community. “We beg to assure Your Excellency,” they concluded, “that in assisting

43. MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. III, The Muslim Deputation and Address, 1 October 1906.

the Mahomedan subjects of His Majesty at this stage in the development of Indian affairs, in the directions indicated in the present Address, Your Excellency will be strengthening the basis of their unswerving loyalty to the Throne and laying the foundation of their political advancement and national prosperity, and Your Excellency's name will be remembered with gratitude by their posterity for generations to come. And we feel confident that Your Excellency will be gracious enough to give due consideration to our prayers."<sup>44</sup>

Minto's reply was the 'most sympathetic'. As he delivered his talk, the Deputation cheered him again and again with shouts of 'hear, hear'. He announced his complete agreement with the view that any electoral system in India must have to recognise the various religious beliefs of the people. Making a definite commitment on behalf of his Government, Lord Minto finally said:

"I am as firmly convinced as I believe you to be that any electoral representation in India would be doomed to mischievous failure which aimed at granting a personal enfranchisement, regardless of the beliefs and traditions of the communities composing the population of this continent . . . In the meantime I can only say to you that the Mahomedan community may rest assured that their political rights and interests as a community will be safeguarded by any administrative re-organisation with which I am concerned . . ."<sup>45</sup>

The Muslims were greatly delighted. "They were all nervous as to the reception they would meet with and the answer they would get."<sup>46</sup> But His Excellency's cordial manner as well as his emphatic assurances aroused in them hopes of a purposive future. Simultaneously, Muslim satisfaction brought to the Viceroy a greater degree of hope. Worried as he was over the anti-partition movement in Bengal, he found in the Simla Deputation a meaningful force to be used against that movement. Immediately after his meeting with the Deputation, he reported the following to the Lieutenant Governor of

44. MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. III, The Muslim Deputation and Address, 1 October 1906.

45. Mary, Countess Minto, *India Minto and Morley*, 47.

46. MTP, no. 73, Dunlop Smith to Hare, 2 October 1906.



Eastern Bengal: "I have just received the Mohammedan Address, and followed your advice as pointedly as I could in the direction of recognising the Deputation as a thoroughly representative body . . . I hope this morning's work may help to clear the air in your direction."<sup>47</sup>

The Viceroy knew what he wanted to do. While the Muslim leaders wanted an assurance about adequate representation in the impending new legislature, the Viceroy saw in their demands political dimensions of a different kind, which, as he felt, would weaken the representative institutions on one hand, and strengthen the imperial administration on the other. He wrote to the Secretary of State: "As to the Deputation, I very much hope you will be satisfied with the reports of my speech . . . I was very anxious to avoid appearing to take sides, while yet heartily acknowledging the soundness of Mahommedan arguments . . . As far as I can judge, the whole affair was an immense success. The members of the Deputation were more than satisfied . . . The Aga Khan, who headed the Deputation, lunched here a few days ago, and I had much talk with him. He agrees with all the natives with whom I have talked who are worth mentioning that India is quite unfit for popular representation in our sense of the word."<sup>48</sup>

At the instance of the Viceroy the Reuters news agency had sent home a full account of the Deputation's Address, and the Viceroy's reply. The London papers gave good coverage to the news and also printed favourable views. Morley happily observed the Press and the politicians approving of the developments. "It seems," he congratulated the Viceroy, "as if all had gone excellently. It will be interesting to see how our Hindu friends take it. Anyhow, you have done a valuable day's work, whatever the future may produce."<sup>49</sup>

The Secretary of State was fully aware of the implications of a pro-Muslim attitude of the Viceroy which came out unmistakably at the Simla episode. He was, therefore, anxious about the Hindu reaction to it. The Viceroy, too, was appre-

47. MTP, L & T, 1906, vol. II, no. 71, Minto to Hare, 1 October 1906.

48. MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. III, 4 October 1906.

49. MRP, Morley to Minto, vol. I, 5 October 1906.

hensive of it, though in his own way, mentally prepared to ignore it. "I wonder what the Bengalees will think of it," he noted within minutes of his address to the Simla Deputation. And, within four days, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of Calcutta wrote the following, which more or less expressed the Hindu feeling in general.

"The whole thing appears to be a got-up affair and fully engineered by interested officials . . . So the all-India Mahomedan Deputation is neither all-India, nor all-Mahomedan, nor even a Deputation, properly so-called. It is only an instrument in the hands of the officials to whitewash their doings. In other words, the authorities wanted a few simple-minded men of position to give them a certificate of good conduct. They knew the Hindus would not do it. So they began operation among the older classes of Mussalmans."<sup>50</sup>

The Indian nationalist Press also questioned the views of the British-owned Press like the *London Times*, the *Pioneer* and the *Englishman* that the Simla Deputation was a thoroughly representative body of the Indian Muslims. To counteract this view, the composition of the Deputation was described at length. It was pointed out how most of the Indian provinces were either meagrely or not at all represented, how some of the leading and respectable Muslims did not like to identify themselves with the Deputation, and how the new generation of English educated Muslims were out of it. On the other hand, it was said, it was the older class of conservative Muslims, who, with their outmoded ideas, looked at the elective institutions with horror, comprised the Deputation. The Indian Papers made no secret of their suspicion of the motives of the Viceroy. It was said that Minto was not fond of speeches, and since his arrival ten months earlier, had not made any lengthy speech. But, his speech to the Simla Deputation was 'the first utterance of any length from Lord Minto's lips'. Secretive and taciturn by nature, the Viceroy generally chose to keep his opinion about various political matters strictly to himself. But, his 'Moslem Address' was an exception. It touched on definite subjects and the political

motivation behind it was crystal clear.

Another point the nationalist Press made against Minto was his reference to the loyalty and patriotism of the Aligarh politicians. The Viceroy had told the Deputation that "now when there is much that is critical in the political future of India, the inspiration of Sir Syed Ahmed and the teachings of Aligarh shine forth brilliantly to the pride of Mahomedan history in the loyalty, commonsense and sound reasoning so eloquently expressed in your address." Commenting upon this, *The Tribune* wrote: "Sir Syed Ahmed's opposition to the Congress was not at all creditable to him. There are many Mahommedans of position, culture and influence who wholly disapproved of the unholy alliance he entered into with Sir Auckland Colvin and the Anglo-Indian Press to vilify the Hindus and their political agitation."<sup>51</sup>

Finally, the Indian Press expressed its grave apprehension about the Viceroy's attitude towards the much expected representative institutions in India. The Liberal Government at home was already talking of reforms. John Morley had aroused hopes in Congress circles that constitutional concessions would soon be forthcoming. But Minto's line of approach appeared contrary to the political aspirations of nationalist Indians. His assurance to the Simla Deputation created a fear that "if Mr. John Morley is guided wholly and even largely by Lord Minto in this matter we do not think there is any chance of our receiving anything worth having."

While a section of the Press, thus, viewed the Simla Deputation as if it was the product of an Anglo-Muhammedan conspiracy, other sections of the Press considered the episode as a normal affair. For example, *The Indian Mirror* commented: "We are in entire sympathy with the aims and aspirations of our Mahommedan brethren. Hindus and Mahommedans are, after all, children of the same soil. Their interests are the same, and their hopes and yearnings must be the same."<sup>52</sup>

The Viceroy was more eager to ascertain the views of the

51. *The Tribune*, 4 October 1906.

52. *The Indian Mirror*, 4 October 1906.

Congress leaders in particular than of the nationalist circles in general. He was happy to see that the Congress moderates had failed to assess the implications of his Simla Address. A few of the moderates even expressed their appreciation of the Viceroy's gesture towards the Muhammedan community. In London, John Morley tried to ascertain the feeling of Ramesh Chandra Dutt, a veteran Congressite and realised to his surprise that that leader had not grasped the implications of the Viceroy's commitments. "He professed to have no fault to find, only insisting that Nawab Mahmoud who was to have been the spokesman (of the Deputation), was himself a Congress man."<sup>53</sup> It is apparent that the National Congress, at that point of time, could not have anticipated how the Simla episode would shape the future developments.

The immediate result of the Simla meeting was the tremendous encouragement which the Muslim leaders derived from the highest place of authority for their future course of action. While congratulating Dunlop Smith, Mahdee Ali Mohsin-ul-Mulk said:

"You will allow me on behalf of the members of the Deputation to assure you that His Excellency's great speech in reply to the Address embodying as it does, a clear and sympathetic recognition of the rights of the Mohammedans of India, as a distinct community, based on as generous appreciation of their political importance as being inferior to that of no others, has put a new heart in us, and will always, with gratitude, be treasured by us and our posterity as a historic declaration of the policy of the Indian Government."<sup>54</sup> Organisational activities began almost immediately after the Simla meeting among the Muslim leaders which, both in purpose and contents, went counter to the Congress movement. The Viceroy wanted to remain above suspicion. "Whatever one may think of them," he told Morley, "it is really extraordinary that there should be any one so narrow and short-sighted as to imagine that the Mahommedan deputation gave

53. MRP, Morley to Minto, vol. I, 11 October 1906.

54. MTP, Correspondence, vol. II, no. 109, Mohsin-ul-Mulk to Dunlop Smith, 7 October 1906.

me an opportunity of attacking Bengali sentiment.”<sup>55</sup> Within days, however, the Bengali sentiment against the partition of Bengal got attacked from the Muslims of Eastern Bengal when they proceeded to celebrate the partition itself. Pro-partition meetings were organised at a number of places with thousands of Muslims taking part. While the Hindus regarded those demonstrations as government-sponsored, the Government circles described them as genuine, ‘just as genuine as the Hindu opinions’. The Viceroy was happy to see that the Congress anti-partition movement was now face to face with a Muslim pro-partition movement. The Secretary of State was obliged to thank the Viceroy saying: “The whole thing has been as good as it could be, and it stamps your authority and personal position decisively.”<sup>56</sup>

Though he was not its creator, yet the emerging Muslim political force became a source of strength to John Morley. In Parliament, the pro-Congress Members were vocal against the partition and consistently pressed for a change in partition arrangement. Morley could now challenge them by pointing to the existence of a counter agitation in favour of partition. Talking to Minto on this he said: “Among other good effects of your Mahometan deliverance in this that it has completely deranged the plans and tactics of our Cottonians: that is to say, it has prevented them from any longer presenting the Indian Government as the ordinary case of a bureaucracy *versus* the people. I hope that even my stoutest radical friends will see that the problem is not quite so simple as this.”<sup>57</sup>

Coming to the Muslim leaders in India, the Simla Deputation appeared to them as the stepping-stone towards a more vigorous political venture. The Aga Khan, by virtue of his position and religious status, as well as by the strength of his limitless wealth, came to be accepted both by the British and the Muslims as the champion of the cause of the biggest religious minority in British empire. ‘A pleasant man’ and

55. MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. III, 9 October 1906.

56. MRP, Morley to Minto, vol. I, 26 October 1906.

57. Ibid.

'too Europeanised', he could come very close to the highest English dignitaries once his importance was realised in a prospective political role. "I believe," said the Secretary of State to the Viceroy, "he is a real friend of the *Raj*; and whatever he is, he knows a great deal of all sorts of men and forces that you and I can get but scanty and defective glimpses of."<sup>58</sup> The Viceroy reposed his full confidence in the Aga which became a source of strength to the latter for looking forward. He, therefore, lost no time in reaping the fruits of governmental assurances and support. On 29 October 1906, he wrote to Dunlop Smith:

"In order to reach the definite objects mentioned by the Deputation in the petition to H.E. the Viceroy I have asked all the members of the Simla Deputation to form into a permanent committee and I have given to my old friend Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk, who as you know is a most loyal and jealous Mohammedan, certain instructions regarding the methods by which he is to proceed during my absence. I have also asked him not to move in any matter before first finding out if the step to be taken has the full approval of Government privately as otherwise unintentionally he might be led to do something or other that would leave the Government in an inconvenient situation."<sup>59</sup>

The Viceroy could not have denied his blessings to a pro-British permanent Muslim organisation to counteract the anti-partition and *Swadeshi* movements. He knew how in Eastern Bengal the Hindu landlords tried to enforce on the Muslim tenants the vows of *Swadeshi* much to their disliking. A class conflict of a socio-economic character was slowly making its headway when a religious tinge to it became pregnant with definite political potentialities. The only thing necessary to make use of that potentiality was a political organisation. While Minto's direct hand in bringing that organisation into existence is not very evident, his indirect influence in that regard can seldom be doubted. While the Aga Khan's trusted

58. MRP, Morley to Minto, vol. I, 26 October 1906.

59. MTP, Correspondence, vol. II, no. 126, Aga Khan to Dunlop Smith, 29 October 1906,

lieutenants were seriously busy in preparing for their impending gathering by the end of December 1906, the Viceroy happily informed the King Emperor at the middle of that month that "The Mahommedan movement has done a great deal of good in making it clear that there are other factors to consider besides mere Bengalee interests."<sup>60</sup>

So at last, at Dacca, the capital of Curzon's new province, the All-India Muslim League was formed on 30 December 1906. The Nawab Salimullah of Dacca played the host to the gathering. The Aga Khan's most 'trustworthy man', Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk played the role of the Chief Organiser. Nawab Vikar-ul-Mulk was elevated to the chair from where as the President of the new born organisation he announced to his co-religionists the following policy:

"Time and circumstances made it necessary for Mahomedans to unite in association so as to make their voice heard above the din of other vociferous parties in India and across the wide seas in England. The duty of Mahomedans was to loyally serve Government, and so much was their cause bound up with that of the British *Raj* that they must be prepared to fight and die for Government if necessary."<sup>61</sup> Defence and not defiance of the Government was declared to be the motto of the new organisation. It further made it clear that the Muslims should not support the National Congress in its hostility towards the Government. It acknowledged the fact that the Government sympathy lay with the Muhammedans and that the cause of the Muhammedans was the cause of the British. The genesis of the idea for such a Muslim organisation was traced to the encouraging consequences for the Indian Muslims which emanated from the Viceroy's kind reception to the Simla Deputation.

"India was on the eve of a new era," declared the Nawab of Dacca, "and Mohammedans were awakening from the coma into which they had fallen. The new political movement had been forced on them. Had the party now in power in England been familiar with the position of Moslems, and had"

60. MTP, Letters, H.M. no. 17, Minto to the King, 12 December 1906.

61. MTP, News, vol. I, *Pioneer*, 2 January 1907.

Indian public men represented justly Moslem claims, the movement might perhaps not have been heard of, but quiet unobtrusive work was now at a discount and only those who cried loudest had a chance of being heard.”<sup>62</sup>

The resolution which brought the All-India Muslim League into existence ran as follows:

“That this meeting, composed of Mussalmans from all parts of India assembled at Dacca, decides that a Political Association, styled the All-India Moslem League, be formed for the furtherance of the following objects: (a) to promote among the Mussalmans of India feelings of loyalty to the British Government and to remove any misconceptions that may arise as to the intentions of Government with regard to any of its measures; (b) to protect and advance the political rights and interests of Mussalmans of India and respectfully to represent their needs and aspirations to Government; (c) to prevent the rise among Mussalmans of India of any feelings of hostility towards other communities without prejudice to the other objects of the League.”<sup>63</sup>

The next resolution of the League contained an open challenge to the National Congress and a declaration of its rejection of the nationalist movement against the partition of Bengal. “That this meeting considers,” it said, “that partition is sure to prove beneficial to the community which constitutes the majority of the population, and that all such methods of agitation as boycotting should be firmly condemned and discouraged.”<sup>64</sup>

The League, since its birth, thus possessed alarming portents against the Congress in particular and the national aspirations in general. The Viceroy’s hands were strengthened on both fronts, namely, in facing the Congress while it claimed for representative institutions, and in facing the home authorities who paid due recognition to nationalist demands. He could identify Indian nationalism with Hindu chauvinism in order to counteract the policies of the pro-Indian Members in

62. MTP, News, vol. I, *Pioneer*, 2 January 1907.

63. Muslim Resolutions at Dacca, see *Pioneer*, 2 January 1907.

64. Ibid.



British Parliament. He could equally slow down the zeal of the Secretary of State in his proclaimed role as a reformer. "I believe," said the latter to the Viceroy, "we did not think enough at first—certainly I did not—of the position and latent strength of the Mahometan element. I believe I now do full justice to this side of the situation, and that you exactly describe our real position and our policy."<sup>65</sup>

The role which the Muslim League came forward to play was first to agitate against the *Swadeshi* movement, and next to agitate for their exclusive rights in future frame of constitutional changes. The Nawab of Dacca, with the League and the Government behind him, hastened himself to play a decisive role in East Bengal politics. He drew away his co-religionists from all kinds of anti-British measures including the boycott of foreign goods which the nationalists so ardently campaigned among the people of Eastern Bengal. Simultaneously, he set his devoted followers to oppose the Congress supported movements against the partition of Bengal. In view of his role, a grateful Hare, the Lieutenant-Governor of Eastern Bengal, decided to rescue the Nawab from his economic plight and financial bankruptcy in order to prop up his political status. He pressed upon the Viceroy for a big central loan to the Nawab to save his estate from passing to other hands. The denial of the Indian Government for such a loan "will be a great blow to the prestige of this Government and of my personal influence with Muhammedans," informed Hare to Minto.<sup>66</sup>

The Viceroy, in the meantime, felt it necessary to give a moral boost to the Aligarh school of thought through patronisation of the Aligarh educational institution. He was in close touch with Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk till his death in October 1907, and thereafter, with other leaders of the Aligarh thought. For the Aligarh leaders the time appeared opportune to draw greater Government grants for the spread of their ideology not only in and around Aligarh, but in other parts of

65. MRP, Morley to Minto, vol. II, 24 January 1907.

66. MTP, Correspondence, 1907, vol. I, no. 219, Hare to Minto, 27 April 1907.

India. The Hindu secular education was responsible for general disloyalty towards the established Government. A true religious education of the Aligarh type would restore those lost values and reestablish in the mind of the youth a sense of devotion towards the established structure. "The evils," prayed the Aligarh trustees, "which recently have been perceived to result from a system of education dissociated from religious teaching, the unrest in the country and a consideration of its causes and obvious consequences, make us feel more strongly than ever, our duty both to our community and to the Government. That duty requires that we should send forth to every Province of India a number of young men trained at Aligarh (on the lines that form the special feature of its education) imbued by sentiments of deep loyalty to the Government and of soberly patriotic devotion to the progress of their country."<sup>67</sup> To realise this objective, they persuaded the Government for generous sanctions to enlarge the dimensions of the Aligarh institution.

The Anglo-Muhammedan rapprochement and the birth of the Muslim League came at a significant juncture of modern Indian history. The National Congress was no longer confined to annual meeting places for expression of loyalty and for passing of formal resolutions. The followers and supporters of that organisation were on the streets to agitate and disobey, to burn the British goods, and encourage rebellious attitude among the masses of people by their words and deeds. The Liberal Government at home, and the pro-Indian Members of Parliament were very much worried about Indian developments and seriously thought of pacifying the Indian feeling. Reform—the magic word of the hour—was the much talked of issue both in India and at home, considered as the panacea for all ills, but yet the nature and contents of that boon remained a matter of speculation, discussion, doubts and misapprehensions. It depended mainly on two persons to give a definite shape to that amorphous idea, namely, the Viceroy and the Secretary of State. While the latter was inclined to appreciate

67. MTP, Correspondence, 1908, vol. II, no. 73, Enclosure, Trustees of Aligarh to Minto, 21 September 1908,

the Congress demands for constitutional advance, the former got prepared to advance the Muslim-minority problem as the real crux of constitutional considerations.

It was through these complexities and intricacies—imperialism, nationalism, and communalism trying to cut each other in cross purposes—that the famous Morley-Minto Reforms or the Act of 1909 shaped itself. This Reform therefore was destined to assume a character of its own, at once progressive and regressive, workable towards democratic objectives, but harmful for national unity.

The British statesmen did not really think of giving to India anything approximating British institutions. “That is a fantastic and ludicrous dream,” declared Morley in Parliament. “You cannot give universal suffrage in India, and I do not insist that India should be on the same footing as our self-governing Colonies like Canada.”<sup>68</sup> So, the little that they wanted to give was by way of taking a few Indians to the Central and the Provincial headquarters for expressing their opinion on some specified subjects of limited value.

The Congress was anxious for representative institutions wherein elected members, or even non-official members, would be in a position to discuss all administrative matters including finance. The Liberal Ministry, particularly the Secretary of State John Morley raised high hopes in their mind that something by way of a constitution was surely to come. But between the Liberals at home and the Congress in India there stood the Conservative Viceroy Lord Minto to whom “However much we may admire our own constitutional history, our Constitution . . . is the result of a long course of historical experience unknown to India, whilst our political party machinery, which the Bengali would imitate, is, as we know, full of faults, which we ourselves regret, and which it would be fatal to encourage here.”<sup>69</sup>

But the influence of Gokhale on Morley was quite considerable. To keep the Congress on lines of moderation, constitutional reforms were the only safe method. The Indian problems were presented to the Liberals in a vivid manner and

68. Morley's Budget Speech, August 1906.

69. J. MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. II, 16 May 1906.

the Secretary of State wrote to the Viceroy in June 1906: "I wonder whether we could now make a good start in the way of reform in the popular direction. If we don't, is it not certain that the demands will widen and extend into 'National' reasons, where I at least look with a very doubting and suspicious eye? Why should you not now consider as practical and immediate things,—the extension of the Native element in your Legislative Council, instead of four or five skimpy hours; right of moving amendments. (Of course officials would remain a majority.)"<sup>70</sup>

The Viceroy could know that in any kind of reform, an increase in representation on the Legislative Councils should form unavoidably the most distinguished feature. He at first thought of such an increase with some nominated members from some select bodies. "The bodies that occur to me," he wrote, "are the universities, with perhaps some selected Colleges such as Aligarh, but I should be afraid that their representation would be tinged with Congress aspiration, and their influence would require to be balanced somehow, possibly by representation from the Oudh *Taluqdars* and other associations representing landed property. Whatever addition was made on such lines would have to be balanced by a similar addition of official Members."<sup>71</sup>

The Viceroy's mind was too closed to understand what indeed the Congress or the progressive Indians wanted. His outmoded suggestions, therefore, carried him nowhere. The talk of the time centred round elections, and elective representatives. Morley wanted to present some ostensible form of representative Councils. As the talk of election went round and round with more people talking more and more of it, the Aligarh leaders came to the forefront to discuss the future of the Indian Muslims in the context of prospective elections. Once the Viceroy took up the cause of the Muslims, the nature of the forthcoming reforms appeared to him as not too dangerous to the imperial interests. Constitutional proposals were made to circle round the interests of the Muslim community.

70. MRP, Morley to Minto, vol. I, 15 June 1906.

71. MTP, Correspondence, Eng. & Ab., L & T, vol. I, no. 36, Minto to Hewett, 11 July 1906,

The Reforms were not coming straight away. It took a long time to evolve any definite idea. The exchange of proposals between London and Calcutta clearly proved how vague were the notions of the authorities regarding the needs and aspirations of a subject population. To begin with, the authorities gave their serious consideration whether to take or not to take Indian Member or Members into the Viceroy's Council and the India Council of the Secretary of State. At length, the first offer in the name of reforms came when two Indians were taken into the India Council against intense opposition from the Viceroy. The two Members, of necessity, represented the two major communities, K.G. Gupta for Hindus and Sayyid Hussain Bilgrami for Muslims. Since they had no work to do on behalf of India in far-away London, in a Council where the wishes of the Secretary of State were the words of law, their appointments evoked no visible pleasure or satisfaction in Indian political spheres. The Congress was eager to see an Indian Member in the Viceroy's Council and was agitating for it for long. When the authorities finally agreed on this after prolonged controversies, the problem was whom to select for that august office. Morley had a soft corner for Gokhale, and knowing his influence on the mind of the Indian elite as well as the masses, tried to advance his name. But to the Viceroy, it was the most preposterous idea to take a man of that importance to the supreme executive body of the empire. "Gokhale is," he protested, "by far the ablest of that school whom I know. I am bound to say he has always talked good sense to me. But I could not trust him. I don't know what there is behind him. His political career is no doubt directly associated with his bread and butter and I am very suspicious of the wires by which he is worked. He is, too, a Mahratta Brahmin, which means a great deal . . . A Congresswallah is to my mind quite out of the question, not on account of any objections that you or I or the European Community might raise, but because of the interpretation that would be given to the appointment by the vast majority of the native population,—which would be that it was a surrender to ideas which are undermining our power and which are thoroughly distasteful to the best native elements in the

country.”<sup>72</sup>

With much acumen in searching for an appropriate man Minto at last discovered S.P. Sinha. But when his appointment became certain, the Muslim leadership stood up to present an opposition. Sayyid Hussain Bilgrami, himself a Member at the Council of the Secretary of State, opposed the admission of an Indian to the Viceroy's Council. Here was an example of typical Muslim attitude towards the appointment of a Hindu. The Muslim demand for their separate political identity in elections and representative institutions was by that time in process of formulation. If, therefore, there was a Hindu somewhere in power, there should also be a Muslim to restore the balance.

In January 1909, some of the Muslim leaders appeared before Morley to protest against the appointment of a Hindu in the Viceroy's Council. The unhappy Secretary of State described of them in the following manner: “Amir Ali, the head of them, is a vain creature, with a certain gift of length, and I believe that I could convert him from the Crescent to the Cross, if I would only make him a K.C.S.I. His troop, I am told, represented the Aligarh breed of Mussulman.”<sup>73</sup> They came to voice their disapproval of the presence of a Hindu at the highest place of authority. Morley challenged to know from them if the Muslims liked the principle of a Native Member at all of either community to be accepted and set up or not; and Amir Ali personally confided him that he for one did not want it. Others pressed for a second Native Member, a Muslim by all means. The Secretary of State, however, did not commit himself to a promise of that sort. The Muslims thereupon looked to the Conservative leaders for support and they got it. “The gale of wind about the Native Member still blows, and whistles, and even screams, in my ear. I bear it with much composure, and when the thing is done, all the world will wonder what the fuss was about. I don't pretend for a moment that the step is not a serious change. It is very serious in all its indirect bearings. I know that, but then the

72. MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. X, 11 June 1908.

73. MRP, Morley to Minto, vol. IV, 28 January 1909.

state of India makes a serious change, and demands 'tremendous innovations'."<sup>74</sup>

Morley's misfortune did not subside with Amir Ali's departure. The Aga Khan himself now came before him with the support of the entire Muslim League to oppose the entry of a Hindu to the highest place. After much discussion, he finally asked: "Well, will you guarantee that five years hence, when the Hindu retires, a Mahommedan shall be put in?" It was a difficult question. How could one Secretary of State bind his successor five years ahead with a commitment like that. Yet, under the compulsions of the situation, Morley gave an indirect assurance in that regard and the Aga returned satisfied.<sup>75</sup>

While the subject was under discussion in the House of Lords, even those Members like Earl Cromer and Earl Ampthill who gave support to the idea, made it clear that the appointment of a Native meant the appointment of a Hindu as well as of a Muslim in alternate manner. "Indeed," said Cromer, "whoever is Secretary of State, I hope he will consider as favourably as possible the desirability of allowing a Mahommedan to have his turn after the Hindu."<sup>76</sup> With this implication accepted, the Indian Member was finally appointed and the Secretary of State had at last the satisfaction to write on 25 March 1909:

"So far,—that is to say, twenty-four hours after the event—the launch of the Indian Member has produced no shock. *The Times* . . . shakes its head a little solemnly, but without scare. They shed tears over the fact that Sinha has not some score of the rarest political virtues in any world—courage, patience, tact, foresight, penetration, breadth of view, habit of authority, and heaven knows what else—just as if all these noble qualities were inherent in any third-rate lawyer that I could have fished out of Lincoln's Inn; or even as if they are to be found in all the members of the Executive Council as it stands today."<sup>77</sup>

74. MRP, Morley to Minto, vol. IV, 4 February 1909.

75. Ibid, 18 February 1909.

76. PP, Lords, Speech of Earl Cromer on Indian Councils Bill, 24 February 1909.

77. MRP, Morley to Minto, vol. IV, 25 March 1909.

Thus, one more step in direction of reforms had been taken. But, these steps were small enough when compared with the question of election and representative Councils. Much debate, discussion, thought and controversy lingered on for a prolonged time before anything tangible was at last produced.

When the talk on the Indian reforms, particularly about enlargement of legislatures had taken some shape, Lord Curzon in the House of Lords subjected such considerations to three conditions. "The first is," he explained in June 1908, "that they have not the appearance of being wrung from him (the Secretary of State) by fear. Let them be measures which, agitation or no agitation, he will be prepared to justify on the ground of their conformity with the best and permanent interests of India. The second condition is, I think, that British rule, which needs as much strengthening and support as we can give it, should not be weakened by them. To enlarge the Legislative Councils in India to a point at which the risk might be incurred of placing the British Government—which is the only possible Government in that country and to which no alternative is capable of being suggested—in a position where they might conceivably find themselves in a minority, would be an act of almost suicidal folly. It would not placate the enemies of the Government, it would eliminate the friends of the Government, and it would embarrass the Executive to a dangerous and fatal degree. The third condition is that the concessions should be preceded by a resolute vindication of the authority of the Government, by the stern repression of those vile incitements to outrage and disorder of which I have been speaking, and by the encouragement of all the loyal forces in India which are waiting for the signal to come forward so soon as they can feel confidence that the Government are strong and will not be afraid."<sup>78</sup>

Such sentiments of the British statesmen at home were natural and appropriate. But, something much deeper was being achieved in India by Lord Minto. Eversince he assured the Muslims at Simla that in any system of representation in which electoral organisations would be introduced, "the



Muhammedan Community should be represented as a community," he made his determined efforts to twist the constitutional proposals to suit his commitment. The Muslims, in fact, wanted an adequate number of seats for them in legislative institutions or any other elective bodies. But Minto designed and perfected the idea of complete separation of Muslims from Hindus in electoral systems and representative institutions. When this theory showed its potency, the Muslim leaders felt enamoured of it and considered it as their supreme constitutional safeguard.\*

John Morley understood the game of the Viceroy well. In order not to divide Hindus and Musalmans in name of reforms, he advanced his famous scheme of 'Mixed Electoral Colleges'. His scheme was contained in his despatch of 27 November 1908, and it ran as follows:

"Let it be supposed that the total population of the Province is 20 millions, of whom 15 millions are Hindus and 5 millions Muhammedans, and the number of members to be elected 12. Then . . . nine Hindus should be elected to three Muhammedans. In order to obtain these members, divide the Province into three electoral areas, in each of which three Hindus and one Muhammedan are to be returned. Then, in each of these areas, constitute an Electoral College consisting of, let us say, a hundred members. In order to preserve the proportion between the two religions, 75 of these should be Hindus and 25 Muhammedans . . . That body (Electoral College) would be called upon to elect three representatives for the Hindus and one for the Muhammedans . . . In this way it is evident that it would be in the power of each section

\* Soon after the Simla Deputation, Mohsin-ul-Mulk wrote to the Viceroy: "Both on the Supreme and Provincial Councils an adequate number of seats should be reserved exclusively for the Muhammedans. The present system of election applicable to the general body of the people need not be interfered with and it should remain open as hitherto, to all communities." (See Minto Papers, Correspondence, vol. II, no. 108, Letter from Mohsin-ul-Mulk, 7 October 1906.) The Viceroy's opinion was that "The only representation for which India is at present fitted is a representation of communities as I said in my reply to the Muhammedan Deputation." (See Morley Papers, Minto to Morley, vol. V, 23 January 1907.)

of the population to return a member in the proportion corresponding to its own proportion to the total population.”<sup>79</sup>

The National Congress, meeting at Madras on 28-30 December 1908, congratulated the authorities on their Reform proposals. It passed a resolution saying that “this Congress desires to give expression to the deep and general satisfaction with which the Reform proposals formulated in Lord Morley’s Despatch have been received throughout the country; it places on record its sense of high statesmanship which has dictated the action of the Government in the matter, and it tenders to Lord Morley and Lord Minto its most sincere and grateful thanks for their proposals.”<sup>80</sup> Muhammed Ali Jinnah, at that time a veteran nationalist and an opponent of Aligarh communalists, thanked the Government for the concession it wanted to sanction and called upon the Muslims to approve of the mixed electoral system.

“It is a well-known thing,” said Jinnah at the Madras Congress, “that responsibility brings with it sobriety, and unless you throw a certain amount of responsibility upon an individual or a nation you are likely to allow that individual or nation to drift astray and I have no doubt that now that this responsibility is thrown on our shoulders we shall show to the world and to England that we are competent and capable of receiving these reforms and a great deal more in future. From the Muhammedan point of view, speaking for myself, I think and I feel that there are many other Muhammedans, who ought to join cordially with our Hindu brothers.”<sup>81</sup> Unfortunately for the Congress and Muhammed Ali Jinnah, the day after the Madras Congress closed, Lord Minto proceeded to destroy the concept of a joint or mixed electorate. This is what he wrote to the Secretary of State on 31 December 1908, emphatically rejecting the latter’s scheme:

“People here have, unfairly, somewhat jumped to the

79. Morley’s Despatch on Mixed or Composite Electoral College, 27 November 1908.

80. INC, Resolution II, 1908.

81. CC, Speech of M.A. Jinnah, Madras Congress, December 1908.

conclusion that you have instructed us to accept the scheme—whereas you have merely commended it to our consideration. But the Mahommedans are already in arms about it, and an examination of the conditions which must affect their election as advised, will, it seems to me, certainly establish the reasonableness of their objections. To put it briefly, they say that large Hindu majorities will enable Hindus not only to elect their own man but a Mahommedan as well, and that that being so a Mahommedan may be elected representative of advanced Hindu political inclinations, and not at all of bona-fide Mahommedan interests. Moreover the old fashioned Mahommedans who are such a loyal mainstay to us, are not likely to push themselves forward and will be left in the lurch, if opportunity is given for the election of manipulated Hindu votes to secure seats for a younger Mahommedan generation that is being drawn into the vortex of political agitation. My reply to the Mahommedan address (at Simla October 1, 1906) is often quoted. It has always been taken to express the views of the Government of India in respect to the Mahommedan representation . . . I declared myself to be in full agreement with their claims as a community and they are quite entitled to refer to the assurance I gave them that their political rights and interests as a community would be safeguarded in any administrative reorganisation.”<sup>82</sup>

Minto's hold on his subordinates was so thorough that his stand on the electoral issue was supported by most of the top administrators of India. It may be mentioned here that the Muslim opposition to joint electorate was very much less aggressive than the opposition from the Indian bureaucracy. Soon after the scheme of Morley became public, the Muslim League met at Amritsar and expressed its gratitude to the Secretary of State and the Viceroy. Some of them, however, felt that 'Lord Morley had failed signally to provide proper and effective safeguards against the majority nominating its own ticket-holders for the minority'. "But," wrote Mahomed Ali, one of the prominent leaders of the League, for the information of the Viceroy, "we succeeded in the end in

82. MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. XII, 31 December 1908.

convincing our friends that the best way of convincing Lord Morley of our patriotism, as opposed to sectarianism, was a generous recognition of what was conceded to India, while emphatically protesting against the fallacy which provided for the election of *members* of our community when we asked for provision for the election of our *representatives*.”<sup>83</sup> It is apparent from the correspondences that though the League leaders were unhappy with the Joint Electorate, yet they were not prepared to throw it away since the number of their representatives remained as they wanted. It was the Viceroy, however, who assured them of a change of the scheme. On his behalf, Dunlop Smith wrote back to Mahomed Ali: “After all Lord Morley’s proposal for an electoral college was only a suggestion, and I am in great hopes that it may be possible to secure some modification of the scheme by which Lord Minto’s communal system may be utilized so as to safeguard the proper representation of minorities.”<sup>84</sup>

The letter speaks for itself. The Nawab of Dacca was taken into confidence. So, too, Imam Ali. Memorials were prepared by the League. Deputations were organised to meet the Secretary of State at London, and also, His Majesty the King Emperor. While the Muslims moved on expected lines, Minto set his governors and heads of local governments to raise their voice of disapproval of Morley’s scheme. Describing the scheme as ‘utterly unworkable’, ‘full of mischief’, etc., he could proceed to the extent of inciting some of his lieutenants to come out boldly against the Secretary of State. To cite one instance only, Minto said to the Governor of Madras: “I do not for an instant think the Secretary of State will push them, but please say all you can against them.”<sup>85</sup>

The shrewd Viceroy also set the Conservatives at home to oppose the Liberal Secretary’s pro-Congress stand. To Lord Lansdowne he wrote: “The ‘electoral colleges’ are absolutely impossible—mad and distinctly contrary to pledges I had

83. MTP, Correspondence, 1909, vol. I, no. 8, Mahomed Ali to Dunlop Smith, 7 January 1909.

84. MTP, L & T, 1909, vol. I, no. 17, Dunlop Smith to Mahomed Ali, 12 January 1909.

85. Ibid, no. 26, Minto to Lawley, 19 January 1909.

given to the Mahommedans, and of which the Government of India approved. We simply can't have them. I am so glad you saw the meaning of the deputation to me—it was far the most important event that has happened during my time.”<sup>86</sup> Finally, the King's support was invoked through Conservative circles. Poor Morley was summoned by His Majesty to discuss ‘the question of protection of Muhammedan interests’ for which the Viceroy in India was congratulated by a Muslim leader thus:

“We are truly grateful to His Most Gracious Majesty for the interest He is apparently taking in the welfare of His loyal Muhammedan subjects and to His Excellency the Viceroy for his protection of our rights. I assure . . . that all this will bind the Muhammedan Community still closer to the British Rule with the silken chains of sincere gratitude and loyalty and will strengthen the Anglo-Muhammedan bond of union a hundred-fold.”<sup>87</sup>

In the opinion of the Muslim League Lord Minto was their champion in their ‘struggle for self-preservation and self-defence against an aggressive majority’. The deputation of the League headed by Amir Ali was on its way to England. A perturbed Secretary of State wrote to the Viceroy: “I have agreed to receive the sons of the Crescent . . . I wish the Prophet himself were coming!! There are not many historic figures whom I should be better pleased to summon up from Paradise, or wherever he now abides. Your language to the Islamites about their ‘just claim to something more than numerical strength’ was perhaps a trifle less guarded than it might have been, if you will allow me to say so.”<sup>88</sup>

The Muslim Deputation met Morley on 27 January 1909. The outcome was a foregone conclusion. Pressed by His Majesty the King, the Conservatives, the Viceroy and the Indian bureaucracy, and the Muslim League, the Secretary of State yielded ground and agreed to give up the proposal for

86. MTP, Correspondence, Eng. & Ab., L & T, vol. II, no. 55, Minto to Lansdowne, 21 January 1909.

87. MTP, Correspondence, 1909, vol. I, no. 27, Muhammed Shafi to Dunlop Smith, 18 January 1909.

88. MRP, Morley to Minto, vol. IV, 21 January 1909.

mixed electoral college. The only alternative was the acceptance of the idea of Separate or Communal Electorate, or as it was termed, exclusive Muhammedan Electoral College.

Time was nearing for the Secretary of State to steer the Second Reading of the Indian Councils Bill in Parliament. The Congress was late in understanding the secret arrangements that were going on between the authorities and the Muslim League, and that there was no time for its leaders to initiate a counter move.

On 23 February 1909, John Morley, while presenting the Bill in the House of Lords, summed up the issue of Muslim Electorate saying:

“I ought to say a few words to your Lordships about—I mean the Mahomedans. That is a part of the Bill and scheme which has no doubt attracted a great deal of criticism and excited a great deal of feeling in that very important community. We suggested to the Government of India . . . the plan of a mixed or composite electoral college, in which Mahomedans and Hindus should pool their votes, so to say . . . The political idea at the bottom of that recommendation which has found so little favour was that such composite action would bring the two great communities more closely together, and this idea of promoting harmony was held by men of very high Indian authority and experience who were among my advisers at the India office. But the Mahomedans protested that the Hindus would elect a pro-Hindu upon it, just as I suppose in a mixed college of say seventy-five Catholics and twenty-five Protestants voting together the Protestants might suspect that the Catholics voting for the Protestant would choose what is called a Romanising Protestant and as little of a Protestant as they could be . . . At any rate, the Government of India doubted whether our plan would work, and we have abandoned it . . .

“The Mahomedans demand three things . . . They demand the election of their own representatives to these Councils in all the stages, just as in Cyprus, where, I think, the Mahomedans vote by themselves . . . So in Bohemia, where the Germans vote alone and have their own register. Therefore we are not without a precedent and a parallel for the idea

of a separate register. Secondly, they want a number of seats in excess of their numerical strength. Those two demands we are quite ready and intend to meet in full. There is a third demand that, if there is a Hindu on the Viceroy's Executive Council, there should be two Indian members on the Viceroy's Council and that one should be a Mahomedan . . .

"To go back to the point of the registers, some may be shocked at the idea of a religious register at all, of a register framed on the principle of religious belief. We may wish, we do wish—certainly I do—that it were otherwise. We hope that time, with careful and impartial statesmanship, will make things otherwise. Only let us not forget that the difference between Mahomedanism and Hinduism is not a mere difference of articles of religious faith. It is a difference in life, in tradition, in history, in all the social things as well as articles of belief that constitute a community."<sup>89</sup>

The careful and impartial statesmanship of which the philosopher statesman became hopeful for removal of religious differences in future did not come true during the British period, but the thesis he propounded in the Lords that Hindus and Muslims were two distinct communities became the gospel for others in future to clamour for a separate Muslim state in India. The Liberal Secretary's proposals for communal electoral system were heartily approved of from the Opposition side by the redoubtable Lord Curzon who said: "I think we all agree with his (Morley's) decision . . . that he was willing to consider an exclusively Mahomedan electorate returning representatives to an exclusively Mahomedan electoral college. I think, if I may say so, that that is a wise and statesmanlike decision. But I would like the noble Viscount to go rather further."<sup>90</sup>

Morley's Muslim policy was, on the whole, received by the Liberals and Conservatives alike with satisfaction. But on

89. PP, Lords, John Morley, Indian Councils Bill, Second Reading, 23 February 1909.

90. Ibid, Curzon's Speech on the Bill, 23 February 1909.

other matters, such as, enlargement of legislative councils, privilege of questions, etc., the Conservative leaders criticised the Government from every conceivable ground of fear. The Bill progressed through Second and Third Readings over a number of days. On the concluding day of the debate Lord Ripon criticised those who were 'filled with a dread of these reforms' by saying: "The late Sir Robert Peel, after the passing of the Reform Bill, once in the House of Commons alluded to the difficulty of carrying on government under an ancient monarchy, a proud aristocracy, and a reformed House of Commons. I venture to say that the difficulty of carrying on Government in India in face of the democratic movement to-day is at least as great, and that the dangers connected with it are at least as serious; and it is because I believe that my noble friend (Morley) has done something to meet these difficulties and to avert those dangers that I give to this Bill my heartiest support."<sup>91</sup> The Bill was passed in the Lords and sent to the Commons.

Surprisingly enough, the reaction in the Indian nationalist quarters was not as sharp as could have been expected. Voices were heard that the separate electorate would 'divide the people and destroy hope of Indian nationality as a political unit'. But the general atmosphere was one of caution and moderation in anticipation of the whole deal of reforms. Moreover, the bureaucracy pointed it out that if Hindus would oppose concessions granted to Muslims, the latter would oppose to the appointment of a Hindu to the Executive Council of the Viceroy. Minto asked his confidants to see that Gokhale and the moderates calmed down the situation "by preaching moderation, and refusing to accentuate the exaggerated interests of communities, on the grounds that the reforms attempt to deal with India as a whole."<sup>92</sup> The Congress moderates, in fact, were at the highest point of their moderation on the eve of the Reforms. Of course, no one at that time could have anticipated what the Separate Electorate stored for

91. PP, Lords, Lord Ripon, 11 March 1909.

92. See MTP, L & T, 1909, vol. I, no. 73, Minto to Edward Baker, 6 March 1909.



future generations.

On 1 April 1909, the Indian Councils Bill was moved in the House of Commons by the Under Secretary of State for India, Mr. Buchanan. The House was required only to re-emphasise the need for Separate Electorate with weightier reasons to show how Hindus and Muslims were different from each other. "If you start from our democratic theories of representative Government," said the Under Secretary of State, "of course, all such special representation is an anomaly, but we have to deal with the practical problem which is before us—the best practical solution which is available. And more than that, particularly with regard to the Mahomedans, they have a special and overwhelming claim upon us, namely, the solemn promises, given by those who are entitled with full responsibility to speak for us."<sup>93</sup> He referred to Minto's promises to Simla Deputation, and Morley's promises to Muslim Deputation. Prime Minister Asquith uttered his words of authority that "undoubtedly there will be a separate register for Mahomedans. To us here in this country at first sight it looks an objectionable thing, because it discriminates between people, segregating them into classes, on the basis of religious creed. I am sure . . . the distinction between Mahomedan and Hindu is not merely religious, but it cuts deep down not only into the traditions and historic past, but into the habits and social customs of the people."<sup>94</sup>

The pro-Indian Members in the House of Commons drew a vivid picture of the inner game which Minto, with his bureaucracy and in alliance with some old fashioned Muslim leaders, had played to bring about that novel doctrine of communal election. "It is most regrettable," said C.J. O'Donnell, "that any religion should be brought down into the arena of political controversy."<sup>95</sup> He argued that such an idea had never existed in India till recent manipulations a few months ago. He challenged the Secretary of State that on earlier occasions he championed the cause of mixed electorate.

93. PP, Commons, Discussions on Indian Councils Bill, 1 April 1909.

94. Ibid, Prime Minister's speech, 1 April 1909.

95. PP, Commons, C.J. O'Donnell, 1 April 1909.

for the purpose of harmony between the two communities, but abandoned his principles under pressure. "Why has it been abandoned?" he asked, and answered: "The Government of India protested against it, and the Secretary of State, I greatly regret, abandoned his own wise decision . . . And the proposal is that we should go down to the people of India and spread amongst them these ideas of sectarianism, which now do not exist, and which up to the present have found no part in our system of Government."<sup>96</sup> It was pointed out that the Hindus were willing to return Muslims to the Legislative Councils with great good pleasure, and that there were many responsible persons among the Muslims who liked the Joint Electoral System. Yet, the authorities listened to a few gentlemen who assembled in London and took a wrong decision on so vital a subject. The Aga Khan was bitterly criticised for his role as a champion of the Indian Muslims without being an Indian himself. (The Aga's ancestors were driven out by some palace feud at Teheran only 80 years ago and they came to Bombay.) It was pointed out how there was no such thing as a Muslim nationality in India. 'You might as well talk about Baptist nationality'. The Government's attitude in favouring the Muslims, it was said, was surely to be misunderstood by the Indian people. And, if Muslims were given a separate electorate, why not the same be given to Sikhs and others? The communal electorate was to embitter mutual relations. It was to poison the Indian social life everywhere in their district and village homes. "You will make a hell of India and shake British power to its foundations if you provide the numerous races and creeds with separate representatives and mutually hostile political aspirations."\*

Till that time, it was claimed, British administration maintained a great tradition, the tradition of equality by treating all races, all religions, and all creeds, with equal justice. The partition of Bengal broke up that principle by favouring the Muslims of Eastern Bengal. The Separate Electorate was the

96. PP, Commons, C.J. O'Donnell, 1 April 1909.

\* This quotation from the *Westminster Gazette* was read out in the Commons.

next vigorous step to break up that principle by favouring Muslims in general, and rousing thereby 'the fanaticism of the Hindu and of India'.

The Leader of the Opposition, A.J. Balfour, criticised the opinion of the English radicals and strongly argued to establish the value of Separate Electorate. To him: "The religious distinctions of India are very different to those with which we are familiar in the country. There they cut far deeper than here into the social fabric, and divide far more fundamentally man from man, family from family, and even village from village."<sup>97</sup> He surprised the radicals by his peculiar stand that while strongly advocating in favour of Separate Electorate, he denounced other features of the Bill vehemently and concluded: "I wish to disclaim on my own behalf, and on behalf of those who usually act with me, any responsibility for the consequences which are likely to follow this legislation."<sup>98</sup>

Challenging Balfour's theory that Hindus and Muslims are two separate races, Henry Cotton argued: "I have lived among them more than 30 years, and in portions of Bengal where I served you cannot tell the difference between a Hindu and a Mahomedan by his language, his conversation, or his manner of life. Even the very names are identical in many cases, and their interests, it goes without saying, are identical also, and to assume that people of this class require separate representation and separate organisation of electorate is to presume upon fundamental ignorance of the actual facts of the case. All this Mahomedan agitation of which we have heard so much in England is really not a representative agitation at all . . . Even His Highness the Agha Khan is the last man in the world to claim to be a representative Indian Mahomedan. His followers exist for the most part in East Africa, and he himself is a Persian, whose grandfather migrated from Persia to Bombay. There is a growing feeling in India among the Mahomedans, a feeling which is growing everyday, that it is the real interest of the Mahomedans to identify themselves with the Hindus as one people."<sup>99</sup> To Keir Hardie: "Unless excited

97. PP, Commons, A.J. Balfour, 1 April 1909.

98. Ibid.

99. PP, Commons, Henry Cotton, 1 April 1909.

by outside intervention, the whole tendency of Hindu and Mahomedan is to live and work amicably together.”<sup>100</sup>

Debates continued through several sessions. The number of pro-Indian Members being small, their voices were drowned in loud protests and arguments from the Conservatives benches. Knowing for certain that the Liberal Cabinet was bound by promises to bring about reforms, the Conservatives upheld their views determinedly that if at all there should be constitutional concessions for India, there should also be Communal Electorates together with those concessions. Ultimately, the majority consensus had to culminate on that point. Fantastic arguments, far-fetched imaginations, and bitter denunciation of Indian capability for responsible positions were repeated fervidly in course of discussions. The Hindu-Muslim antagonism was presented in such horrid colour that to most Members of Parliament any political compromise between the two communities appeared almost impossible. Separation was regarded, therefore, as the only rational method to escape the tangle. The pro-Congress Commoners were obliged to satisfy themselves by describing the Conservative speeches as ‘unfortunate’, ‘mischievous’, ‘unworthy’, ‘regrettable’ and ‘deplorable’.

After the tortuous debates, a humiliated Morley wrote to the Viceroy whose cause had then been the cause of the entire Parliament: “Irreconcilable inconsistencies between what you said, and what I said, once upon a time and what we say today—all this was very easy to demonstrate . . . I am sure that I console myself by remembering that it was you who set the troublesome ball rolling in a famous speech which I have heard so often quoted in debate—but I know every word of it by heart, and so with less than my usual compunction, I can only ask you to make what you can of the Sphinx’s riddle.”<sup>101</sup>

The ‘famous speech’ which started the Muslim movement was the Viceroy’s Simla Speech. And, by maintaining a Sphinx-like silence regarding his own principles on the issue, the Secretary of State gave the Viceroy an easy walk for

100. PP, Commons, Keir Hardie, 1 April 1909.

101. MRP, Morley to Minto, vol. IV, 28 April 1909,

victory.

When the Separate Electorate became a settled fact, Minto emerged from the crucible of politics as the saviour of the Indian Musalmans. "The hearts of the Mahommedans of India were filled with deep gratitude to the Government, and they saw that, in the new Councils, not only would their interests be safeguarded owing to the presence on them of a sufficient number of their own real representatives, but that the state of things thus created would secure the stability of the British Government, which they look upon as their very own, and would prevent the Hindu dream of *Swaraj* from being realised," wrote Muhammed Shafi.<sup>102</sup>

With Reforms finally announced, and elections to the reformed Councils on way, many among the ruling circles became aware of the fact that the Government had shown much undue favour to the Muslims. Some of them were happy for it, but some others became apprehensive, too. "No feature of this scheme will, we believe," wrote the *London Times*, "give greater satisfaction in this country (England) than the safeguards which it appears to provide for the adequate representation of Mahommedan interests."<sup>103</sup> The author of the safeguards, however, himself became fearful of his own doings. "I am afraid," wrote Minto, "when the position is clearer we may fairly be accused of having neglected the even-handed justice to which we owe so much in India . . . I should say that, if the Government of India was biased in any direction, it was towards Mahommedan interest."<sup>104</sup> The man who suffered the qualms of conscience for having surrendered himself to the Viceroy's *diktat* was the Secretary of State. "I won't follow you again into our Mahometan dispute," wrote Morley to Minto at the close of 1909. "Only I respectfully remind you once more, that it was *your* speech about their extra claims, that first started the Mahometan hare. I am convinced my decision was best."<sup>105</sup>

102. MTP, L & T, 1909, vol. I, no. 157, Muhammed Shafi to Dunlop Smith, 30 April 1909.

103. *The Times*, 16 November 1909.

104. MTP, Correspondence, Eng. & Ab., L & T, vol. II, no. 168, Minto to Moberly Bell, 27 November 1909.

105. MRP, Morley to Minto, vol. IV, 6 December 1909.

By the end of the year 1909 elections were going on in India under the provisions of the new Act. With results coming out and the Muslim gains rising up to more than adequate, one of the Calcutta papers, the *Empire*, commented thus:

“When the Councils meet there seems every probability of the Government finding themselves in a position analogous to that of the Light Brigade in the famous verse, slightly adapted:

‘Moslems to right of them

‘Moslems to left of them

‘Moslems behind them

‘Volleyed and thundered’

“Probably the Government never imagined that they would have so many Ma’hommedans to deal with, but there the fact remains.”<sup>106</sup>

The Indian National Congress took the whole episode of the Anglo-Muslim politics rather in a stoical mood. In the last days of December 1909, when the Congress met at Lahore in its twenty-fourth session, Madan Mohan Malaviya, its President, said: “I have faith in the future of my country. I have no doubt that the policy of the preferential treatment of one community over another and all other obstacles which keep the great communities of India from acting together, will shortly but steadily disappear.”<sup>107</sup> This was a mild comment. To Surendra Nath Bannerjea: “It is no exaggeration to say that the Rules and Regulations have practically wrecked the Reform scheme as originally conceived with a beneficence of purpose and a statesmanlike grasp that did honour to all that are associated with it . . . Who wrecked the scheme? Who converted that promising experiment into a dismal failure? The responsibility rests upon the shoulders of the bureaucracy.”<sup>108</sup> The Congress took a year to realise the evil effects of the Separate Communal Electorate, but when it saw the

106. MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. XVI, 30 December 1909 containing newspaper cutting from *The Empire*.

107. CC, Madan Mohan Malaviya’s speech at Lahore Congress, December 1909.

108. Ibid, Speech of Surendra Nath Bannerjea, December 1909,

harm, it was too late to change the course of constitutional history.

The man who had wrecked the constitutional hopes of the Indian nationalists was in the meantime enjoying the fruits of his labour. The reformed Imperial Legislature was discussing the Budget in March 1910. To his immense delight, the Viceroy saw how the Muslim members flew at the Hindu throat one after another and tore the Hindu wishes to pieces.<sup>109</sup>

The Morley-Minto era thus ended with a new turn in Indian political scene. Within the next few years the First World War and its aftermath no doubt brought about a brief spell of Hindu-Muslim harmony, but in the long run it was their political separatism which sealed the fate of a united India.

109. See MRP, Minto to Morley, vol. XVIII, 31 March 1910.

## Indo-British Relations during First World War

THE undoing of the partition of Bengal ended a seven-year old conflict between the British and the Indian National Congress. The partition which Curzon's famous biographer Lovat Fraser described as his 'greatest administrative success' proved very short-lived thanks to the Congress onslaught. This defeat greatly damaged the concept of official invincibility in India. In the Congress quarters, the success led to complacency and self-congratulation, and a lack of ideas about its own future programmes. The Morley-Minto Reforms were being put into operation. For the Congress moderates constitutional platforms were now available to attack the authorities face to face and expose their manifold wrongs. Gokhale was the acknowledged leader of the Congress constitutional movement and he was inclined to maintain a temporary truce with the British in the hope of making his legislative venture a success.

During that interval of peace, the number of political murders was seen to have been negligible. It lulled the authorities to believe that the Indian movement, both the anarchical and constitutional strands, had run out of steam. Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy, informed the Secretary of State at the



close of 1912 after a long tour through many places of India unaccompanied by detectives or special police precaution that 'seditious agitation was dead'.<sup>1</sup> He was wrong. At the end of his tour when he made his state entry into the new imperial capital, Delhi, in true 'Oriental colour and splendour', a bomb was thrown at his carriage. Badly wounded, the Viceroy fell unconscious. The man who stood behind him holding the state umbrella was killed. It was a narrow escape for Lord Hardinge. Two days after the incident, the bed-ridden Viceroy, weak and weeping, felt depressed that "all the improvement that I had noted in the general situation had disappeared through the wanton act of the miscreants who had planned it."<sup>2</sup> For him and others it was a grim fact that the Indian anarchist was still very much alive. To his satisfaction, however, many in the nationalist circles felt sorry at the attack on the Viceroy who had shown genuine sympathy for India.

The twenty-seventh Congress meeting at Bankipore on 26-28 December 1912 expressed its horror and detestation at the dastardly attempt made on the Viceroy's life,<sup>3</sup> and Surendra Nath Bannerjea declared: "I have no desire to anticipate the judgement of history; but this I will say that Lord Hardinge will go down to posterity as one of the most illustrious of Indian Viceroys. His name is inseparably linked with those of Bentinck, Canning and Ripon. Such is the ruler who was struck down by an anarchist. We here detest and execrate from our hearts anarchism and all the principles of anarchism. Anarchism, Sir, is not of the East . . . We can have no patience with anarchism"<sup>4</sup> In due course, Hardinge noted with gratitude, "Gokhale, the leader of the opposition in the Legislative Assembly, told my Private Secretary a few months later that he and his party would never oppose me in any measure that I might consider necessary and he never did."<sup>5</sup>

1. Hardinge, *My Indian Years*, 79.

2. Ibid, 81.

3. INC, Resolution I, December 1912.

4. CC, Surendra Nath Bannerjea, December 1912.

5. Hardinge, *My Indian Years*, 81-82.

The course of Indian politics in general and the Congress politics in particular had to contend with an unusual situation soon. The start of the First Great War hastened the process of political evolution in many countries of the world, and India was no exception. By 1914, the Indian National Congress had completed 30 years. The Congress leaders of the first generation, many of them the founding-fathers, were dead or nearing death. Woomesh Chandra Bonnerjea, Ananda Mohan Bose and Budrudin Tyabji died in 1906, P. Ananda Charlu in 1908, Lal Mohan Ghose in 1909, and Allan Octavian Hume in 1912. During the period of the War, died Pheroze-shah Mehta, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Henry Cotton in 1915, Bishen Narayan Dar in 1916, Dadabhai Naoroji in 1917, and William Wedderburn in 1918. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Annie Besant, Muhammed Ali Jinnah and Madan Mohan Malaviya, among others, were called upon to guide the Congress politics in those critical years of the War, while Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi entered the Indian public life at that time of trials and sufferings.

The War came rather suddenly and demanded an immediate response from all concerned. India had to respond to that call as a part of the British empire, and the response was sounded by the Viceroy and Governor-General on behalf of India. The 30th session of the Indian National Congress in 1914 was different from what it came to be twenty-five years later when the Second War broke out. What the future set-up of their country should be was not clear to the leaders of the nation. The concept of *Swaraj* was nebulous enough to mean many things to many persons, though of course, in its evolution, it was beginning to acquire a clearer thrust, namely, Self-Government. A subject of immediate concern to the Congress on the eve of the War was the operation of the Separate Communal Electorates which had entered the Indian body politic, and not the distant dream about *Swaraj*. Sincere efforts were obviously made for the unity of the two communities for the advancement of the nation. From the side of the Muslim League too, 'the ideal of Self-Government for India within the British Empire' was adopted with considerable enthusiasm. The Congress encouraged this happy trend and

greatly appreciated the realisation of the League that 'the political future of the country depends on the harmonious working and co-operation of the various communities in the country'. In the Karachi session of 1913, the Congress resolved: "This Congress most heartily welcomes the hope expressed by the League that the leaders of the different communities will make every endeavour to find a *modus operandi* for joint and concerted action on all questions of national good and earnestly appeals to all the sections of the people to help the object we all have at heart."<sup>6</sup> Nawab Syed Mohammad Bahadur, a distant descendant of Tipu Sultan, presided over the session, and made an appeal to the Hindus and the Muslims to unite in the interests of their country. Muhammed Ali Jinnah joined in the efforts to make that unity a reality.

On the eve of the War, thus, the Indian leaders and the political parties were concerned with their internal problems which mainly revolved round the questions of reformed councils and communal harmony. For an external development of an unprecedented character they had no well thought out response or programmes, nor were they of any great consequence to the Government of Great Britain when it stood up to face the German challenge to its mighty empire.

On 4 August 1914, war broke out between Germany and England. On behalf of India, the Viceroy Lord Hardinge declared war against Germany and Austria.

"To the Princes and Peoples of My Indian Empire," came the Message of the King-Emperor, "During the past few weeks the peoples of My Whole Empire at Home and Overseas have moved with one mind and purpose to confront and overthrow an unparalleled assault upon the continuity of civilisation and the peace of mankind."<sup>7</sup> When the Message was presented to the Legislative Council of India, then meeting at Simla, the House, on 8 September 1914, assured its full support to His Majesty's Government. Sir Gangadhar Chitnavis 'representing the Indian community' moved the following resolution:

6. INC, Resolution IV, 1913.

7. PP, Lords, see discussions on War (Indian Support), 9 September 1914.

“That in view of the great War involving most momentous issues now in progress in Europe into which our August Sovereign has been forced to enter by obligations of honour and duty to preserve the neutrality guaranteed by treaty and the liberties of a friendly State, the members of this Council, as voicing the feeling that animates the whole of the people of India, desire to give expression to their feelings of unswerving loyalty and enthusiastic devotion to their King-Emperor and an assurance of their unflinching support to the British Government. They desire at the same time to express the opinion that the people of India, in addition to the military assistance now being afforded by India to the Empire, would wish to share in the heavy financial burden now imposed by the War on the United Kingdom, and request the Government of India to take this view into consideration and thus to demonstrate the unity of India with the Empire.”<sup>8</sup>

The Raja of Mahamudabad, one of the important Muslim leaders of that time, seconded the resolution by saying that the entire resources of India in men and money should be placed at England’s disposal.<sup>9</sup> Every non-official member present in the Council spoke in favour of the resolution, and the Viceroy was greatly pleased to hear Malaviya, who, in an eloquent speech, declared: “India recognises her duty at this present moment and, God willing, will loyally and manfully discharge that duty, that no sacrifice of men or money will be grudged in order that the British arms should triumph, in order that the success of the British arms should establish the triumph of right over might, of civilisation over the military barbarism of Germany, of ordered freedom over military slavery, and of everything that men have held dear in the last hundred years.”<sup>10</sup>

The resolution was carried without a single vote of dissent.

The Princes of the Indian states, who numbered nearly 700, also rallied to the defence of the empire. They offered the resources of their territories as well as their personal services

8. PP, Lords, see War (Indian Support), 9 September 1914.

9. BML, PP, 1914-16, vol. XLIX, no. 4.

10. Ibid.

for the War. Several of them were selected for active service, such as the Chiefs of Jodhpur, Bikaner, Kishangarh, Ratlam, Sachin and Patiala. Many of the regents, heirs-apparent and brothers of the ruling princes also proceeded to the front. Twenty-seven of the larger states in India maintained Imperial Service Troops the services of which were immediately placed at the disposal of the Government of India. Contingents of cavalry, infantry, sappers and transport, besides a camel corps from Bikaner, were accepted from twelve more states and despatched to different war areas. The Gaekwad of Baroda and the Maharaja of Bharatpur placed all their resources at the disposal of the King-Emperor. The Maharaja of Mysore gave 50 lakhs of rupees to the Government; contributions came from several princes to establish a hospital ship; the Maharaja of Rewa offered even his private jewellery; the Nepal Durbar placed its military resources at the command of the Viceroy; and even the Dalai Lama of Tibet offered one thousand troops while informing the Viceroy that innumerable Lamas 'throughout length and breadth of Tibet are offering prayers for success of British Army and for happiness of souls of all victims of War'.<sup>11</sup> All these offers of help came from the princes at the very beginning of the War, indicating thereby their readiness for much greater sacrifice in days to come.

Within a few days of the War, the Viceroy, the Governors, and the Lt. Governors received letters and telegrams from all parts of British India 'from communities and associations, religious, political and social, of all classes and creeds, also from individuals offering their resources or asking for opportunity to prove loyalty by personal service'.\* Generous contri-

11. BML, PP, 1914-16, vol. XLIX, no. 3.

\* Notable among such associations were: the All-India Muslim League, the Bengal Presidency Muslim League, the Muslim Association of Rangoon, the Trustees of the Aligarh College, the Bihar Provincial Muslim League, the Central National Mahomedan Association of Calcutta, the Khoja Community and other followers of Aga Khan, the Punjab Muslim League, Mahomedans of Eastern Bengal, Citizens of Calcutta, Madras, Rangoon, and many other cities, Bihar

*Contd.*

butions began to pour in from individuals and groups to the Imperial Relief Fund. Messages expressing loyalty also came from the frontier tribes of distant Khyber.

The Indian community in England, including Indian students, also offered their services. M.K. Gandhi had landed in England the day the First War broke out. He had gone there from South Africa before his return to India. In spite of his indifferent health, he became active in organising an Indian Ambulance Corps 'as an expression of loyalty to the Empire in its hour of need'.<sup>12</sup>

India thus rose in support of Great Britain to face the War. The question of the War finance for utilising the Indian Army outside her frontiers came up for immediate consideration before Parliament. Under the provisions of the Government of India Act, 1858, it was not constitutionally proper to charge upon the revenues of India the cost of troops that might be sent outside the country. The assent of both Houses of Parliament was necessary before any such charge could be debited to the revenues of India. Several times after that Act, the Indian Army was used in wars outside India at India's cost, and the First War was not going to be an exception, though the cost of this War was going to be enormous by all means. But this time, the Cabinet was armed with the argument that the Indian Legislative Council had itself moved and passed the resolution that India should be allowed not only to send her troops, but to contribute the cost of their maintenance and pay. Acknowledging this 'spontaneous and splendid assistance which our great Dependency of India is giving us', the Prime Minister Asquith moved in the Commons on 16 September 1914: "That His Majesty having directed a military force, consisting of British and Indian troops, charged upon the revenues of India, to be despatched to Europe for service in the War in which this country is

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Landholders' Association, Madras Provincial Congress, Taluqdars of Oudh, Punjab Chiefs' Association, United Provinces Provincial Congress, Hindus of the Punjab, Chief Khalsa Diwan representing orthodox Sikhs, Bohra Community of Bombay, and Parsi Community of Bombay.

12. CW, vol. XII, Preface,

engaged, this House consents that the ordinary pay and other ordinary charges of any troops so despatched, as well as the ordinary charges of any vessels belonging to the Government of India that may be employed in this expedition which would have been charged upon the resources of India if such troops or vessels had remained in that country or seas adjacent, shall continue to be so chargeable . . .”<sup>13</sup> Seconding the resolution, Bonar Law said: “Previously when Indian troops . . . have been used out of India the Government of India has looked with a jealous eye in order to see that no part of the financial burden would fall on the people of India. Now the Indian Government, representing and inspired by the Indian people, are not only sending their sons to risk their lives at the side of our own soldiers, by whom they will be proudly welcomed as comrades, but are insisting on bearing a share of the burden of the expense which is involved . . . It is on moral forces that we rely today . . . This assistance from India is . . . coming not from force, but from goodwill.”<sup>14</sup>

Parliament was happy that the huge expenses of the War were to be borne by the common people of India without protest. The support of the princes, the expression of sympathy from many quarters, and the resolution of the Legislative Council, etc., were taken to symbolise the goodwill of the entire population. In view of this, to some responsible persons in England it appeared logical that in face of the overwhelming sympathy of the people for the Government, the malcontents in the National Congress, or for that matter, the Congress as a whole, could be safely ridiculed as a party of no consequence. In certain sections of the British Press, the Congress was belittled for its past anti-British utterances. In the columns of *The Times*, the demonstration of loyalty and devotion to the cause of the empire was described as proof “that the voice we are accustomed to hear is that of a comparatively small section of professional talkers, whose occupation has disappeared in the face of the mighty issues which are moving the real heart.

13. PP, Commons, Asquith, 16 September 1914.

14. Ibid, Bonar Law, 16 September 1914,

of the people.” The ‘professional talkers’ referred to were, naturally, the Congress leaders.

To the friends of the Congress in Parliament these insinuations appeared uncalled for since the Congress, by its support to the war efforts, had directly encouraged various sections of the people to demonstrate loyalty to the Government. They expressed a sense of gratitude to the people of India and voiced their protest ‘against the most unfortunate and most ungracious attack’ on the supporters of the Congress.<sup>15</sup>

In India, it was the need of the hour for the Government to try to woo the Congress. When the twenty-ninth Congress met in Madras in the closing days of December 1914, for the first time in its history, the Governor of a Presidency attended its proceedings in his official capacity. Lord Pentland attentively listened to the Congress resolution which conveyed its unswerving allegiance to the British connection. The time was indeed grave for the Congress leaders not to discuss controversial issues. At that hour of great crisis in the life of the empire, India wanted to play a role worthy of herself. “Go and observe what is taking place at the seat of War in France, amid the arid wastes of Arabia, on the eastern coast of Africa. The manhood of India is shedding its best blood in the defence of the Empire,” said Surendra Nath Bannerjea.<sup>16</sup> “India does not chaffer,” said Annie Besant, “with the blood of her sons and the proud tears of her daughters in exchange for so much liberty, for so much right. India claims the right, as a nation, to justice among the peoples of the Empire. India asked for this before the War, India asks for it during the War, India will ask for it after the War, but not as a reward but as a right does she ask for it. On that there must be no mistake.”<sup>17</sup>

The Congress had no other option but to adopt divergent policies as its twin objectives. It could not but support the War efforts of the Government in and outside the Councils, on its platform as well as in Press. At the same time, it decided to express hopes for a bigger constitutional

15. PP, Commons, see discussions on War, 16 September 1914.

16. CC, Twenty-Ninth Congress, Surendra Nath Bannerjea, December 1914.

17. Ibid, Annie Besant, December 1914.



advance while opposing the harsh and rigorous war measures of the Government which appeared unconstitutional. In 1914 itself, the Madras Congress made its attitude clear in both these respects. Help to the British emanated from deeper and nobler values, from 'the sole desire to bravely combat the dangers with which we are threatened and to see that not only civilisation, but the very soul of humanity, may not lapse into chaos and be utterly lost'. This nobler desire apart, the Congress leadership, nevertheless, came forward to straighten out the practical political issues involving the Government and the country. Bhupendra Nath Basu, the Congress President, described the Congress as His Majesty's Opposition for co-operation with the Government in good works done, while voicing at the same time on behalf of the country what was good for it. "You may chain Prometheus," he declared, "but the fire is lighted and cannot be extinguished. India wants a higher life, a wider sphere of activity and usefulness . . . India wants that her children should have the same rights of equal citizenship as other members of the Empire. India wants the removal of vexatious hindrances on the liberty of speech and freedom of the Press, fruitless and dangerous alike to the Government and the people. And, above all, India wants that her Government should be an autonomous Government under the British Empire."<sup>18</sup>

The leaders were aware of the new order that was destined to emerge out of the holocaust of the War. In Europe, it was a war of the nations to knock off the last vestiges of medieval domination of one man over many, and of one race over another. It was 'not possible to roll back the tide of wider life which is flowing like the warm gulf stream through the gateways of the West into still waters of the East'.

The Congress resolutions of 1914 contained expressions of both loyalty and opposition. It resolved to stand by the empire in its great efforts against the enemy. At the same time it also resolved to support the *Swadeshi* movement for the boycott of the British goods. It protested against the Press

18. BML, X 808/7837, INC, Bhupendra Nath Basu, Madras, 1914.

Act, as also against the Separate Electorates.<sup>19</sup> Finally, the resolution expressed the following meaningful sentiment: "That this Congress begs to place on record its high appreciation of the services rendered to India by H.E. the Viceroy and expresses the hope that his tenure of the office may be extended for such time as, after the cessation of the War, may be necessary for a proper settlement of the great and far-reaching issues affecting the future position of India as a component and equal part of the Empire."<sup>20</sup>

The Congress was full of praise for Lord Hardinge for his expression of sentiments which clearly vindicated the rights of equal citizenship. He was thanked for his moral support to the action of the Indian community in South Africa in offering and organising passive resistance.

Hardinge, in fact, tried his best to earn an honourable recognition for the Indian Army in its war placements. When Indian troops were ordered to proceed to Egypt, Malta and Gibraltar, he 'protested vigorously and demanded that these splendid divisions should be sent to France, pointing out the slur that would be imposed on India by the presence of Algerian and Senegalese troops in the French Army in France, and that the patriotic enthusiasm for the war in India would receive a serious damper if the activities of the Indian divisions were restricted to garrison duties in the Mediterranean'.<sup>21</sup> The Cabinet accepted his recommendation and the Indian divisions reached France just in time to play a heroic role. The Viceroy also fought for the right of the Indian soldiers to receive the Victoria Cross for bravery and the soldiers justified that confidence by their daring feats and by winning that honour.

The War efforts of the Government of India rose to the requirements of the Great War. Seven divisions of infantry and two divisions and two brigades of cavalry were sent from India just at the beginning of the War. 'Altogether 80,000 British officers and troops and 210,000 Indian officers and men were sent from India overseas during the first six months of the War.'<sup>22</sup>

19. INC, Resolutions IV, XV, XVI, and XVIII, 1914.

20. INC, Resolution XX, 1914.

21. Hardinge, *My Indian Years*, 99.

22. *Ibid*, 102.

These efforts were to increase vastly as the War progressed. Material resources which India was obliged to supply staggered imagination.

While the Great War raged all over the world, Indian politics entered a new phase and acquired a new dimension. The War directly kindled many political hopes. The heroic manner in which the Indian troops fought side by side with British soldiers in many difficult fronts aroused a sense of pride in many Indian minds. It was a time of mutual understanding between England and India in working out many details in practical fields, and out of that relation was born a sense of equality. The worth of the Indian fighters was a testimony to the worth of the Indian people and the cause for which they fought came to be elaborated in the Indian Press as the cause of human dignity and freedom for all races everywhere.

Outwardly of course, the national leaders felt it desirable to not to ventilate during the period of crisis their political aspirations as well as their opposition towards a government in a crisis. But, they continued to nurse the expectation of a spontaneous response from the British rulers to the political needs of a dignified nation. If England could not favourably react to India's hopes, India was ready to react to that apathy. Within a few months of the War, critical attitudes began to develop in India which surcharged the political atmosphere. The War had no doubt necessitated an ungrudging support to the British nation, but the fact remained that the Government was neither liberal nor popular, and that it was gradually losing its credibility because of the people's suffering. Looking back to the immediate past, the politicians of India saw how their sustained pressure for political concessions ultimately brought about the Morley-Minto Reforms; but which, when put into operation, proved itself not only inadequate in every respect, but harmful in many. It was the known reluctance of the British to even agree to reforms which pained the leaders most. This feeling became much more sharp in the new context in which while Britain praised India for her help and continued to expect more and more help, her leaders preferred to remain silent on what they thought of India's political aspirations. Even towards some minor demands from the

people, the Government showed its absolute indifference. For example, 'the right to carry arms', 'the right to bear Commissions in the Army', and 'the right to form Volunteer Corps in the defence of hearth and home' were not conceded in spite of repeated demands. The Madras Congress asked in irritation: "How long will these be denied to the Indian people?"<sup>23</sup>

Beneath the ready co-operation in War efforts, thus, there were the feelings and factors of an explosive nature. It now depended on the Indian leadership to handle that situation.

It is surprising that the War Cabinet in Britain was more alert to Indian sensitivity than the Government of India. The distant eyes of the Secretary of State were focussed on India's more radical leaders. The political development in India came under serious observation right from the beginning of the War and the British Government was prepared for all eventualities.

It was Tilak whose wartime activities attracted a close observation. In January 1915 Lord Crewe, the Secretary of State, cautioned the Viceroy: "It appears that Tilak and his party, to be described as non-revolutionary extremists (though some individuals are doubtless only non-revolutionary from discretion), are anxious to be readmitted to the Congress by a modification of the rules of election, no doubt in hopes of capturing it by a majority in course of time. The Tilak plan,—and the comparison is interesting,—is precisely that of Parnell; opposition pure and simple to Government on constitutional lines, that is to say obstruction without violence. No connexion with the public services or any public bodies of any kind, but the object to bring administration to a standstill."<sup>24</sup> That the 'semi-revolutionary' leaders like Tilak commanded considerable support among the mass of people was a known fact. His concept of Self-Government alarmed the Secretary of State to such an extent that the latter saw in it nothing but 'a movement to end the British Dominion in India'.<sup>25</sup> He was shocked at the death of Gokhale who

23. INC, see Resolutions, 1914.

24. HP, Crewe to Hardinge, 22 January 1915.

25. Ibid.

provided leadership at that critical juncture of the War, even though his policy was known to be 'association with Government where possible and opposition to it where necessary'. Gokhale was the best hope of the Government in those worst days of the War. With his departure from the Indian scene, Tilak's ascendancy became inevitable. "I suppose, by the way," wrote Crewe, "that it is not unfair to assume that Gokhale's end was hurried on by the attacks made upon him, by Tilak's party in the last months of his life?"<sup>26</sup> Crewe's days in India office, however, were coming to an end. Austen Chamberlain took over from him in May 1915.

The Viceroy was equally shocked at the death of Gokhale. "He was the leader of the opposition in the Legislative Assembly, a really good orator and debater, a statesman, and a man for whom I had the highest respect. He and I worked together very closely and cordially in our efforts to alleviate the situation of the Indians in South Africa, and his co-operation was most helpful. His death was a great loss to India as there was no other statesman in India of his calibre," wrote Hardinge.<sup>27</sup> He was becoming increasingly anxious over the symptoms of restlessness in some parts of the empire. He paid serious attention to the rising hopes of the Indian nationalists, to the discontent among the people in general, to the wartime rigours from which the country suffered, and to the Congress demands and suggestions for Indo-British amity. Convinced of the need for some prompt action to please the Indians, the Viceroy decided to move the home authorities as best as he could in those directions. He prepared a long confidential memorandum, describing in detail what the situation in India was at that moment and what she really deserved for her benefit. "Were the faith of the people of India to be shaken," he warned, "and their legitimate aspirations and ambitions denied, the consequences might be far-reaching and disastrous."<sup>28</sup>

He was concerned over the unchanging attitude of the

26. HP, Crewe to Hardinge, 7 May 1915.

27. Hardinge, *My Indian Years*, 115.

28. BML, B.P. 7/26, Hardinge Memorandum, October 1915.

official classes towards Indian demands, and for their vain pride that everything was being done for the betterment of the people. Even if their contention could be accepted as correct, there was the need for a harmony of aims which alone could strengthen the administration. "Man does not live by bread alone, and I think that Indian officials do not always recognise that peace, plenty and material progress—while they are an essential object of good government—fail to satisfy the intellectual and spiritual side of human nature."<sup>29</sup> The British official was yet to understand that he had a role to play in the political self-development of the subject people on the basis of liberalism and nationality by which a people of ancient learning and culture, after suffering centuries of conquest and oppression, might be uplifted and gradually strengthened. He was yet to grasp that the prestige of his Government depended upon the spirit of understanding with which he himself approached his task in the changing conditions.

The Viceroy's main purpose was to impress upon the home authorities that the India of 1915 was not the India of either 1900 or 1910. Since the death of Queen Victoria fifteen years earlier, the political changes, and also the other developments and new ideas in the British Isles were nothing in comparison with the political progress and social regeneration that took place in India during the same period. "India cannot, and will not, remain stationary. She realises her backward condition and her inferiority in development amongst the sister nations of whom the British Empire is composed. That it is so is a reproach to her, which all Indians are anxious to do away with, and in removing it she must be helped and guided by the Imperial Government."<sup>30</sup>

The Hardinge Memorandum contained the following proposals for speedy implementation: Modification of the Arms Act, Abolition of the Indian Excise Duty on cotton goods, Modification of Regulations of Imperial and Provincial Legislative Councils, Improvement of the position of India within the Empire, Abolition of Indentured Labour, State Aid for

29. BML, B.P. 7/26, Hardinge Memorandum, October 1915.

30. Ibid.

Indian industries, Appointments of Indians to the Privy Council, and Increased employment of Indians in the Public Services. The most important of all was the suggestion for Council Reforms. The Viceroy knew that any new Act by Parliament in that regard in the thick of the War was impossible. But, there were enough opportunities within the scope of the Morley-Minto Act to meet the popular hopes. The Viceroy was eager for some immediate concessions. Delay, to him, was full of risks. He suggested, therefore:

“There must be a notable relaxation of the control, and more particularly the financial control, exercised by the Secretary of State, which at present ties the hands alike of the Imperial and Provincial Governments; and there must be introduced into the Provincial Legislative Councils a real and effective elected majority composed of representatives of constituencies in which the majority of voters are Indians. To carry out this reform no structural change of the Morley-Minto scheme would be necessary, as only some slight modification of the present arrangements would give the desired result. To begin with it will be inexpedient and undesirable to disfranchise any interests that are now represented in the Provincial Councils. But it will be necessary to add to every provincial Legislative Council a sufficient number of seats to secure a majority of representatives of Indian electorates. The guiding principle should be that in every Provincial Council there should be a majority, however small, even if it be of only one, of elected representatives of constituencies in which the majority of voters are Indians.”<sup>31</sup>

Hardinge expressed his opinion with the best of intentions. As a man on the spot, he understood the governed more accurately than either the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State could. But his views received scant respect. Nothing need be done while the War was on no matter if India resented the delay, was the typical British attitude of the time.

The new Secretary of State, Austen Chamberlain, knew of the developments inside the Indian National Congress, especially about the conflict of opinion between the moderates

31. BML, B.P. 7/26, Hardinge Memorandum, October 1915.

and the extremists. He was requested to express appreciation of the manner in which the Indian leaders had 'abstained from political propagandism and have shown a wish not to embarrass Government during the War'. William Wedderburn pleaded for an understanding with the Congress in the interests of the empire. "What is necessary," he said, "is to rally all Moderates, and this might be done in the next message from the Throne by a direct reference to the services that are being rendered by India during the War and an indication of His Majesty's wish that Indian aspirations for self-government and for a fitting position in the Empire should receive sympathetic consideration."<sup>32</sup> Even the Aga Khan met the Secretary of State to tell him that any controversy or rift within the Congress at that time would be unfortunate. Wedderburn had no faith in the new Secretary of State. He, therefore, approached men like Lord Reay and Lord Crewe to move the Cabinet to agree to some positive steps.

When Chamberlain came to know of Wedderburn's moves, he wrote to the Viceroy: "It seems to me that it would be difficult to frame any declaration which would at once give satisfaction to those whom he calls the 'Moderates', and would not be cited hereafter as conveying promises and encouraging hopes which our successors might not feel justified in fulfilling. Indeed I am inclined to think that we should probably incur both evils, and should at one and the same time disappoint the 'Moderates' and give rise to exaggerated hopes."<sup>33</sup> The Secretary of State thought his duty was over by advising the Viceroy to exercise a sobering influence on the leaders of the Congress.

The British silence over the Indian aspirations gave the Congress extremists a clear advantage over the moderates. Wedderburn and K.G. Gupta tried their best to hold the Congress together because of the War emergency. But in the absence of the Government showing a gesture of goodwill it became impossible for them to keep the Congress on a path

32. HP, see Austen Chamberlain to Hardinge, 29 October 1915 containing extracts from Wedderburn's letter.

33. HP, Chamberlain to Hardinge, 29 October 1915.



of moderation. To bring the Government to its senses, they at last issued a manifesto regarding the question of self-government for India. This annoyed even Lord Hardinge who was himself advocating for a similar announcement. "I have no opinion of Wedderburn," he said, "as he is out of date, does not know what he is talking about, and is prompted by vanity to do all he can to keep his name before the Indian public. I am, however, surprised that Gupta, who ought to have learnt sense while a Member of the Secretary of State's Council, should have put his name to such a manifesto, especially in view of the fact that he has the reputation of having been most bureaucratic in his methods when a Civilian in Bengal. He must know perfectly well that the views he puts forward are quite unacceptable, and that they would only tend to create trouble and controversy."<sup>34</sup>

K.G. Gupta met the Secretary of State in the last week of November 1915 to request him 'to make some statement, preferably in the King's speech on closing Parliament, as to the development of representative institutions in India and the progress in that direction which was to be expected at the end of the War'. Chamberlain rebuked him for the opinion he held and the manifesto he signed. "I did not conceal from him that I thought it a very mischievous document calculated to stir up the Extremists to further efforts and to spread agitation at a time when every sensible person must feel that all contentious matter ought to be avoided," he wrote.<sup>35</sup> Chamberlain demanded to know what was the earliest time in which India would be ready for the changes indicated in the joint note of Wedderburn and Gupta. It was difficult for Gupta to give a reply. But the Secretary of State pressed for it and Gupta said: "Well, I should hope that in fifty years a great advance would have been made." Chamberlain then challenged him "to consider what would be thought of a British Prime Minister who undertook to lay down in a King's speech the course of British policy for two generations."<sup>36</sup> Writing to the

34. HP, Hardinge to Chamberlain, 12 November 1915.

35. HP, Chamberlain to Hardinge, 8 December 1915.

36. Ibid.

Viceroy, Chamberlain reported: "I confess that I am disappointed by the lack of political wisdom which he has shown and by the readiness with which he has surrendered his own judgment to the influence of Sir William Wedderburn."<sup>37</sup>

The Viceroy in the meantime, was closely watching the affairs of the National Congress and of the Muslim League. He noted with some anxiety: "I am not quite happy at the meeting of the National Congress and of the Moslem League at Bombay towards the end of next month. Happily Sinha, who is very moderate, is to preside over the National Congress, but Mazhar-ul-Haque, who is to preside over the Moslem League, is a very dangerous extremist, and, in my humble opinion, very disloyal.

"With all this noisy talk and newspaper controversy which is in prospect in a few weeks' time, we have at the same time Mrs. Besant, who, being now thoroughly discredited as a religious enthusiast by the orthodox Hindus, has started, with a view to popularity, a campaign in favour of Home Rule for India. She has made speeches of a most violent character in some of the principal towns in India, and no doubt she has done her utmost to inflame public opinion and to create a hostile attitude to Government."<sup>38</sup>

The Viceroy discussed the problem being created by Annie Besant in his Council. The home department perhaps wanted some action against her. But Hardinge decided to hold back for the moment. He was led to believe that she would be disowned by the National Congress and become thoroughly discredited. "If this does not happen, or if it does happen and she should still continue her campaign and extremist speeches, I shall then quietly deal with her by internment under the Defence of India Act."<sup>39</sup>

There were suggestions that, while the War was in full swing and in its critical phase, it would be unwise to hold the annual session of the Congress in December 1915. It was clear that the Congress would discuss political problems,

37. HP, Chamberlain to Hardinge, 8 December 1915.

38. HP, Hardinge to Chamberlain, 12 November 1915.

39. Ibid.

but some felt that the discussion at a time of imperial stress might harm the cause of united action during the War. Such arguments however did not find favour with many people. The authorities noted how both the moderates and the extremists were eager to hold the session and present their views more vigorously than before since the atmosphere was surcharged with apprehensions and expectations. Hardinge was alarmed that all were 'talking nonsense about programmes of concessions after the War, home rule for India, and such like', and he expected that 'the discussions are likely to be extremely heated' at the Congress session.<sup>40</sup> Still more disturbing was the issue that both the Congress and the Muslim League, meeting at the same place and at the same time, might reach some common understanding on the country's demands. The Government of India decided to watch the developments closely.

In December 1915 the National Congress met in Bombay in its thirtieth session. It was a momentous meeting. For the first time in history the All-India Muslim League met at the same place and there was the opportunity for 'camaraderie' between the leaders of the two great communities. The organisers of both the bodies were in one mind regarding the need for co-operation between the two organisations. Bombay attracted a large number of delegates from all parts of India to both the political parties. Though they met in their respective venues, it was so arranged that the Muslim League, in a body, came to attend the Congress session. "At a joint Hindu-Mahomedan dinner, which was organised by some of the educated young men of either community, it was a gratifying and an inspiring sight to see the organisers wearing a brilliant badge which combined the Crescent with the Lotus, symbolising the union of the two faiths in the service of their Motherland and involving the eye of the thinker to see therein the realisation of 'Akbar's Dream' in the not-distant future. The inauguration of this policy of a 'joint and concerted action' by the Congress and the Muslim League has thus been

40. HP, Hardinge to Chamberlain, 24 December 1915.

a memorable feature of the Bombay Congress of 1915.”<sup>41</sup> To that session of the Congress, M.K. Gandhi with his record of service in South Africa and his known faith in Hindu-Muslim brotherhood, added further strength by his presence. Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Pherozeshah Mehta were no more. But, the Congress, as a running stream, was never in dearth of leadership. With the Muslim League coming closer to the Congress, the leaders felt bold to talk of a definite goal for India.

The Congress expressed its pride that the brave soldiers of the land were shedding their blood in the battle-fields of Europe, Asia and Africa, and displaying their courage, bravery and tenacity when pitted against the best organised armies of the world. It further made it known of its firm conviction that the ultimate victory in the War would rest with England. It also noted with gratification that countless men on the allied side were laying down their lives in order that others might live free. Aware of the principles on which the War was being fought, the Congress could not have possibly remained silent on India's own rights.

Should India demand reforms because of the help she was rendering in War efforts? The Congress wanted to make it clear that the demands were the natural outcome of India's growing needs, war or no war. “There is not, I trust,” declared the Congress President, Sir Satyendra Prasanna Sinha, “a single person in our camp who expects reforms as the price or the reward of our loyalty. That loyalty would indeed be a poor thing if it proceeded from a lively sense of favours to come. Nor could any serious and responsible Indian publicist advocate that, as the result of the War, there should be a sudden and violent breakage in the evolution of political institutions in India.”<sup>42</sup> Since India was aware of the nature of the constitutional progress, the Congress could not check the course of that evolution. To M.K. Gandhi: “It is the fashion now-a-days to consider that because we have taken our humble share in the war by not being disloyal to the Government at the present juncture, we are entitled to

41. CC, Thirtieth Congress, Bombay, 1915 (from official records).

42. BML, X 808/7837, INC, Address of S.P. Sinha, Bombay, 1915.

rights which have been hitherto withheld from us as if those rights were withheld from us, because our loyalty was suspected. No, my friends. If they have been withheld from us, the reasons are different and those reasons will have to be altered.”<sup>43</sup>

If India did not claim rewards, it did not mean that Britain should not appreciate India’s services and sacrifices. ‘Promise, pause, prepare, postpone, and end by letting things alone’ should no longer be an acceptable policy in any matter. Britain’s desire to delay reforms was a real danger for India. And hence was there the necessity to press for demands. The Congress, therefore, resolved that “the time has arrived to introduce further and substantial measures of reform towards the attainment of Self-Government . . . namely, reforming and liberalising the system of Government in this country so as to secure to the people an effective control over it, amongst others, by (a) The introduction of Provincial Autonomy including financial independence . . .”<sup>44</sup>

The President, himself a known Congress moderate, assessed the feeling of the majority and, by way of a warning to the Government, said: “I for myself say with all the emphasis and earnestness that I can command that if the noble policy of Malcolm and Elphinstone, Canning and Ripon, Bright and Morley, is not steadily, consistently and unflinchingly adhered to, the moderate party amongst us will soon be depleted of all that is fine and noble in human character.”<sup>45</sup>

The Congress moderates were very much disappointed by the Government apathy. The Bombay Congress showed symptoms of future restlessness which the authorities did not fail to realise. Within three weeks of that session, Lord Hardinge wrote to Chamberlain: “Sufficient time has now elapsed to judge of the recent meeting of the National Congress at Bombay which was opened by an admirable speech of great moderation by Sir S.P. Sinha. Unfortunately

43. CC, Thirtieth Congress, M.K. Gandhi, December 1915.

44. INC, Resolution XIX, 1915.

45. BML, X 808/7837, INC, Address of S.P. Sinha, Bombay, 1915.

the Moderates in the Congress are less noisy than the Extremists, and there is no doubt that the growing ascendancy of the Extremist school and the decline of the influence of the men of the Moderate school of thought and action are two striking developments that have occurred. The citadel of moderation has been successfully attacked in all directions by the multiplication of the Congress. The door has been opened wide for the admission of Extremists such as Tilak into the Congress, and by the adoption by the Congress of a very radical resolution on the question of self-government the Congress has been converted into an Extremist league.”<sup>46</sup>

The Congress and Muslim League went ahead in pressing for constitutional demands. Each organisation formed a committee of its own to draw up a scheme of reform in consultation with the other committee. The year 1916 saw considerable activity in Congress and League circles in matters of unity and advance. Gandhi devoted himself, among other things, to the question of Hindu-Muslim amity. He described before his audiences the picture of South Africa where the Hindus, Parsis and Muslims lived as brothers. “We shall accomplish the tasks that face us in India only when my Hindu, Muslim and Parsi brethren feel that they are all one.”<sup>47</sup> While hopes for reform and attempts at national unity still kept the majority in the Congress busy, revolutionary activities for the emancipation of the motherland suddenly surfaced at many places, particularly in the Punjab and Bengal. Those anarchical activities had had their indirect impact on the Congress extremists. As a sequel to that development, the tone of criticism of the Government became increasingly aggressive and the internal peace in name of an external war appeared more superficial than real.

The Government itself understood its own defects. The War had brought in an increase in prices, and an acute scarcity of goods which the administration could not control to ensure popular contentment. Plague broke out at some

46. HP, Hardinge to Chamberlain, 21 January 1916.

47. CW, vol. XIII, Gandhi's speech at Mahommedan Association, Surat, 3 January 1916.

places to add to the people's misery. Terrorist elements became active in several areas. The so-called *Ghadr* conspiracy in the Punjab brought out restlessness in its most violent form. Incidence of dacoities and murders increased. The Government of Punjab under Sir Michael O'Dwyer did its best to quell the movements. About 700 Sikh revolutionaries from America were actively working in the Punjab of whom more than 300 were arrested and kept in prison under Regulation III of 1818. The rest were kept under police surveillance.

Anarchists and revolutionaries were active in Bengal where rumours were current that the British Government would soon be overthrown. Attempts at an insurrectionary movement instigated by the Germans were nipped in the bud. 'A ramification of the German conspiracy was discovered at Balasore in Orissa and the whole gang of conspirators was hunted down by the police and those who were not shot were arrested.'<sup>48</sup> Prompt action by the Government no doubt contained revolutionary activities, but popular discontent began to mount day by day, and circulation of seditious literature became a normal feature. Distrust towards the Government became more manifest than at any time before. And, from the side of the Government, repression was carried to every possible extent.

Referring to both the Government measures to meet the danger and the anarchist attempt to destroy the Government, Gandhi said in February 1916: "Why this distrust? Is it not better that even Lord Hardinge should die than live a living death? But a representative of a mighty Sovereign may not. He might find it necessary even to live a living death. But why was it necessary to impose these detectives on us? We may foam, we may fret, we may resent but let us not forget that India of to-day in her impatience has produced an army of anarchists. I myself am an anarchist, but of another type. But there is a class of anarchists amongst us, and if I was able to reach this class, I would say to them that their anarchism has no room in India if India is to conquer the conqueror . . . I honour the anarchist for his love of the country. I honour him

48. Hardinge, *My Indian Years*, 127-28,

for his bravery in being willing to die for his country, but I ask him: Is killing honourable? Is the dagger of an assassin a fit precursor of an honourable death? I deny it.”<sup>49</sup> Gandhi was beginning to propound his new style of confrontation. “Let us frankly and openly say whatever we want to say to our rulers and face the consequences if what we have to say does not please them.”<sup>50</sup>

• Worried and exhausted, Lord Hardinge completed his extended term of Viceroyalty in April 1916. His successor, Lord Chelmsford, was serving as a Captain in the Territorials, and was working at Chitogh near Simla when the announcement of his appointment came. Obviously, he had knowledge of Indian affairs.

But Indian affairs were racing towards a new direction. All parties and groups were frustrated that the Government gave no indication of its future proposals for India. The Congress moderates had no new programme to place before the people and hence were fast losing their credibility. They also lacked moral courage to confront the extremists. The latter found in the Government delay an opportunity to advance their demands which, of necessity, became more radical. This accounts for the Home Rule movement quickly spreading in the Bombay Presidency under the leadership of Tilak, and in Madras under Mrs. Annie Besant. Since the Congress split at Surat, it was the moderates who dominated that organisation for nine years. In 1916, the moderates were clearly in a minority and the extremists were gaining ground rapidly. As the War entered its third year, the British statesmen, after their early appreciation of the Indian help, were reluctant to pledge themselves to any definite constitutional advance, and the extremists found the atmosphere congenial for their self-assertion. The public opinion swung in their favour. Moreover, a considerable section of the people came to believe that what India required at that moment was unity among all sections of politicians represent-

49. CW, vol. XIII, Gandhi's speech at Benaras Hindu University, 6 February 1916.

50. Ibid.



ing different shades of opinion. Without a united effort to advance India's claim to a position of honour, the British authorities would remain rigid, or would take advantage of Indian disunity for their own political game.

At other levels outside the Congress and the League too, people discussed about India's future constitutional status. In the later part of 1916, as many as 19 elected non-official members of the Imperial Legislative Council drafted and published a reform-scheme of their own. This scheme proposed in substance the subordination of the executive to the legislature with a view to making the latter the real master of administration. The most important measures advocated were: (1) that the number of Indians in Executive Councils should be increased to one-half, and that these members should be elected, (2) that the Legislative Council should be considerably enlarged, and constituted with an elective majority, and that the Imperial Council should control the Budget, (3) that the Secretary of State's Council should be abolished, and his salary placed on the British estimates, (4) that provincial Government should be made autonomous, (5) that all major provinces should have Governors and Executive Councils, (6) that a full measure of local self-government should be granted, (7) that Commission in the Indian Army should be given to Indian Youths under the same conditions as those which then applied to Europeans.<sup>51</sup>

It was a joint manifesto which the 19 members submitted for the consideration of the Secretary of State.

All such exercises did not, however, lead the country anywhere. The obvious conclusion which many a nationalist drew was that parlour discussion would never bear any fruit. A determined demand backed by agitation was the only alternative.

It is in the wake of these developments that the Congress extremists overcame the Congress moderates and virtually came to dominate the organisation. The Congress recognised the Home Rule movement and prepared to welcome Tilak and his followers back into the fold of its leadership. The Home

51. East India (Progress and Condition), 1916-17.

Rule people in the meantime formed local leagues and committees for active propaganda of the case for self-government. The reform-scheme which the 19 Members of the Imperial Legislative Council had prepared was taken up, radically modified, and made known to the people as the minimum desirable change necessary for India.

The Muslim League, in the meantime, was changing its character from conservatism to progress. The League, for the previous ten years, worked on the principle that its primary function was 'the protection of Muhammedan interests against anticipated Hindu ascendancy'. But, the ideal of self-government inspired the 'young' Muslim activists for a more realistic programme. They wanted to be more and more political, and less and less religious in their public life. Because of their influence the Muslim League came forward to accept the reform-scheme of the 19 members as modified by the Congress radicals. The Muslim demand centred on larger Muslim representation in the proposed legislatures, and the Congress had no objection to it. The committees of the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League met in Calcutta in November 1916 and finalised a scheme in a spirit of mutual trust and goodwill. "It is a matter of infinite gratification to me as well as to all patriotic Mussalmans that the Muslim communal position in this matter has been recognised and met in an ungrudging spirit by the leaders of the great Hindu community," declared Muhammad Ali Jinnah.<sup>52</sup>

The Congress-Muslim League agreement on India's future constitutional development was hailed in the nationalist quarters as 'a significant sign of the time'. The reform-scheme was formulated with the intention to press for the reforms by drawing the attention of Parliament and the people of Great Britain 'in the name of a United India'. In other words, the bureaucratic pre-supposition of Hindu-Muslim disunity was shown to be no longer valid, and the identity of views on political matters, as upheld by the major communities was shown as another landmark in the political evolution of India which the authorities could not dismiss lightly. It was pointed

52. BML, 08023 bb 17, ML, Presidential Address, M.A. Jinnah, 1916.

out that the new generation was impatient of its dependent position and the emerging unity of all people was largely due to that impatience.

While the Congress and the League were coming closer, Tilak and Besant were making their movement more formidable. Their speeches were considered inflammatory. The authorities at last decided to intervene. Under the Defence of India Rules Mrs. Besant was banned from entering Bombay presidency and Central Provinces. Tilak was prosecuted under Criminal Procedure Code, and called upon to execute a bond for Rs. 20,000, with sureties, 'to be of good behaviour for one year'. The Bombay High Court, however, quashed the order.

All expectations now centred on the forthcoming sessions of the National Congress and the Muslim League, going to be held once again at the same place and at the same time. In December 1916, both the bodies met at Lucknow. The Government, too, was eager to get closer to the Congress and Lord Meston, the Governor of U.P., not only attended the Congress session but addressed it. It was for the first time that a British Governor was addressing the Indian National Congress. "We take it that Your Honour sympathises with the rising aspirations of the people," said the Congress President while welcoming the Governor.<sup>53</sup>

The spectacular feature of the Lucknow session was the reunion of the moderates and the extremists after a decade of differences. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Motilal Ghose and other extremist leaders who got separated from the main body at Surat, were given a cordial welcome. It was hoped that they would never part again. "If the united Congress was buried in the *debris* of the old French Garden at Surat, it is reborn to-day in the Kaiser Bag of Lucknow, the garden of the gorgeous King Wajed Ali Shah."<sup>54</sup> The united Congress was bent upon securing from the British an assurance about India's future status. "Gentlemen," read the chairman of the reception committee, "India now demands that after the War things shall not revert to their original condition, but that she shall

53. CC, Thirty-first Congress, 1916, see features.

54. BML, 08023 bb 17, INC, Presidential Address, Lucknow, 1916.

occupy a position worthy of herself as a member of the Imperial family. She is not asking for rewards in return for her loyalty, but having fought in defence of human freedom, she expects that her own sons will no longer be denied their birth right as freemen. It will be strange indeed if England, who is fighting to preserve the sacredness of treaties and the integrity of small nations, should turn a deaf ear to the cry of her own subjects and refuse to redeem her plighted word.”<sup>55</sup>

What the Congress should demand at that time was an open matter. That ‘Great Britain should announce to the people of this country that Self-Governing India is the goal of her policy’, and that Britain should offer the first ‘substantial instalment of reform after the War, as a step towards that goal’, and that ‘Representative Government should be made a reality by the fullest control over civil affairs being given to the elected representatives of the people whose decisions should be binding on the Executive’, etc., became the issues before the session. The Congress was still committed to stand by the Government in its successful conduction of the War. It re-emphasised its obligation to refrain from doing anything which might embarrass the Government. The enormity of the War and its consequences on which rested the destiny of Europe required no reiteration, but only recognition. The Congress thought it was necessary to make the Indian masses conscious of the values and the principles for which the Great War was being fought. Simultaneously, it was also considered a matter of urgent need to formulate on behalf of the people a definite constitutional scheme for implementation after the War and the Congress wanted the people to know the scheme in advance and discuss it.

The question, whether such a campaign was desirable during the War itself, was discussed but dismissed. No country was standing still in those historic moments, and India had no reason to be an exception. Even England was thinking anew of her future national interests. ‘Why should England be embarrassed if, following her own example and that of the Colonies, India too bestows a little attention on some of the

55. BML, 08023 bb 17, INC, Address of Chairman of Reception Committee, Lucknow, 1916,

most vital questions affecting her future?’

The Congress expressed its anxiety over the changed attitude of the British leaders. At the outbreak of the War and during the subsequent months, they were full of praise for and grateful in acknowledging India’s war efforts. There were declarations and promises which led to great expectations. But, by 1916, a silence of doubtful intentions seemed to have enveloped them. That was considered ominous. More ominous was the attitude of the Indian bureaucracy and of the Anglo-Indian Press. The nationalist claims were denounced and the demand for constitutional advancement was criticised. The silence of the highest authorities and the criticism from the official circles as well as from the pro-Government Press provoked the Congress to remind the Government of its earlier utterances and warn it of the consequences of its changed attitude. The Congress President, Ambika Charan Mazumdar, declared: “And how wide-spread and far-reaching must be the unrest which is sure to follow a light-hearted treatment of these solemn pledges and assurances upon which the people have so firmly and so confidently built their future hopes of advancement?”<sup>56</sup> He advanced the following three demands:

1. India must cease to be a dependency and be raised to the status of a self-governing state as an equal partner with equal rights and responsibilities as an independent unit of the Empire.

2. In any scheme of readjustment after the War, India should have a fair representation in the Federal Council like the Colonies of the Empire.

3. India must be governed from Delhi or Simla, and not from Whitehall or Downing Street. The Council of the Secretary of State should be either abolished or its constitution so modified as to admit of substantial Indian representation on it . . . The Secretary of State for India should, however, have no more powers over the Government of India than those exercised by the Secretary for the Colonies in the case of the dominions. India must have complete autonomy,

56. BML, 08023 bb 17, INC, Presidential Address of A.C. Mazumdar, Lucknow, 1916.

financial, legislative as well as administrative.<sup>57</sup>

The Congress finally passed at its Lucknow session its famous resolution on Self-Government. No country could remain static. A generation of leaders could not sit by without looking for a future and striving for its own rights. The leaders at the Lucknow gathering were conscious of the fact that the Congress of the coming days was destined to be different from the Congress of the earlier days. "Every generation has a perpetual devolution and succession of rights and responsibilities. The acquisition of one generation becomes the heritage of the next, and it is the duty of each generation not only to enjoy what it receives from its predecessor, but also to transmit its heritage consolidated, augmented and improved to the one coming after it. Many of those who preceded you in this national struggle have been gathered to their fathers, while those who are still in the field belong to a fast vanishing generation. You ought now to press forward to take their place and hold aloft the banner which is drooping from their sinking hand." For the new generation the goal was self-government, and not the type of concessions granted in 1909.

The new Viceroy's words regarding the hopes of the Indian people and his own duty in that connection created a good deal of confusion in the minds of the leaders regarding his real intentions. Lord Chelmsford had said that "the War by giving India an opportunity to show its practical importance to the Empire had stirred Indian aspirations for developments politically and economically. It would be his endeavour to secure a practical response to this new desire for progress." And, thereafter, he hastened to announce: "My task is to guard India from cramping influences of undue conservatism equally with unpractical revolutionary tendencies."<sup>58</sup> To the deputation of the Indian Association, the Viceroy had further hinted that the reforms should not be rapid. "Well," retorted Surendra Nath Bannerjea at the Congress session, "whether they be rapid or slow, let there be

57. BML, 08023 bb 17, INC, Presidential Address of A.C. Mazumdar, Lucknow, 1916.

58. Ibid, see References to the Statements of British statesmen in Congress Proceedings, Lucknow, 1916.

no reforms by dribblets with a background of mistrust and suspicion. Whatever reform is conceded, let it be whole-hearted, let it be the index of a generous trust reposed in the people, and, above all, let it be adequate to the growing aspirations of India.”<sup>59</sup> In reply to the question of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannermann whether India required a good government or a self-government, he said: “Good government is no substitute for self-government but self-government is necessary for good government and we claim it for the purpose of good government.”<sup>60</sup> In justifying the timing of the Indian demand for self-government, Annie Besant said: “It is said that you ought not to embarrass the British Government by raising such a question as this in the middle of the War. We are only following the example of the Self-Governing Dominions. We are only taking the advice of Mr. Bonar Law who advised the Dominions to strike the iron while it was red hot. After the reconstruction of the Empire the iron will be cold, and where, I ask, is the blacksmith who allows a red hot iron to cool down before he strikes it to the shape and form he wants?”<sup>61</sup>

The British Government at that time was talking of a ‘Federated Empire after the War’. Five nations were to be its members, and India was not one of them. “She is a coloured people, and coloured people are to have the right of domination over them by colourless people. Coloured people have only the duty of submission,” ridiculed Besant. She was critical of the steel-frame in which India was kept during the War. The Press Act, the Defence of India Act, the Seditious Meetings Act, the Criminal Law Amendment Act, and the Regulations of 1818 and 1827, etc., kept the people in constant fear of an all-powerful Government which could do whatever it pleased to maintain its authoritarian hold.

At Lucknow, Tilak not only reasserted his tall stature, but also re-established the appeal of his extremist philosophy. The enthusiastic reception which was given to him was interpreted as an unqualified appreciation of the principles he was fighting

59. BML, 08023 bb 17, INC, S.N. Bannerjea on Self-Government Resolution, Lucknow, 1916.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid, Speech of Annie Besant, Lucknow, 1916.

for since the days of Surat Congress. All those principles, according to him, were embodied in the concept of self-government. "That was the cause of the dissension ten years ago, and I am glad to say that I have lived these ten years to see that we are going to put our voices and shoulders together to push on this scheme of Self-Government. Not only have we lived to see these differences closed, but to see the differences of Hindus and Muhammedans closed as well . . . It has been said by some that we, Hindus, have yielded too much to our Muhammedan brethren . . . I would not care, if the rights of Self-Government are granted to the Muhammedan community only."<sup>62</sup>

Tilak brought clarity to the conceptual development of the ideal of self-government. "When Dadabhai Naoroji declared that 'Swaraj' should be our goal, its name was 'Swaraj'; later on, it came to be known as Self-Government and Constitutional Reform, and we Nationalists style it Home Rule. It is all the same in three different names. There is the objection raised that 'Swaraj' has a bad odour in India and 'Home Rule' had a bad odour in England, and hence we ought to call it Constitutional Reform . . .

"It may not be complete Home Rule, but it is more than a beginning of it. It may not be complete Self-Government, but it is far better than Local Self-Government. It may not be 'Swaraj' in the wider sense of the word, but it is far better than 'Swadeshi' and 'Boycott'. It is, in fact, a synthesis of all the Congress resolutions passed during the last 30 years, a synthesis that will help us all to proceed to work in a definite and responsible manner."<sup>63</sup>

The Muslim response to the resolution on Self-Government was cordial and constructive. The concept of a common land with a common future became the dominant theme of the time. Mazhar-ul-Haque, representing the progressive Muslims of that hour, announced to the Congress: "In all my political life I have been of this opinion that our Motherland cannot advance without the unity of the Hindus and the Muhamme-

62. BML, 08023 bb 17, INC, Address of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lucknow, 1916.

63. Ibid.



dans . . . You are talking about Self-Government and Home Rule, and do you for a moment believe that you will get it by talking? Unless and until you make your Rulers believe that you are earnest, serious in your demand, you will never get anything.”<sup>64</sup> The Hindu leaders at the Lucknow Congress were full of praise for the leaders of Muslim community for their stand on unity and demand, and voicing their sentiments Sarojini Naidu said:

“Members of this Congress, citizens of India who have come from the farthest corners in this great country, I ask you in the name of that greater Nation that is born to-day in this city of Lucknow to offer your thanks to three men,—the Raja Saheb of Mahmudabad, that fearless and independent spirited Mazhar-ul-Haque, and thirdly, Mr. M.A. Jinnah, of whom it was that the late Mr. Gokhale said to me immediately after the last Muslim League in Lucknow that he is the best ambassador of the Hindu-Muslim community. We are united to-day by the efforts of the Muslim League . . . Ours is the right of freedom; we claim it; we take it; you dare not deny to us the birthright of humanity.”<sup>65</sup>

The Muslim League in the meantime was charting a course in the same direction as the Congress. The same city of Lucknow, famous for its medieval splendour and Islamic traditions, gave a rousing reception to the League which met there to take momentous decisions. Its loyalty to the British was not a hidden fact, and its pro-Government policies in the past decade had made the League the mainstay of the Government. That loyalty reached its most spectacular point when the Indian Muslims in the British army were fighting against the armies of the Caliph who was the spiritual leader of the Islamic world. They were fighting, as it was said, ‘in defence of the cause of the Empire to which their secular destinies are linked’. So strong were the Anglo-Muhammedan ties, that the Lucknow session of the League suddenly posed a problem—as if the tide of nationalism would snap that cordial bond.

The War was not going to last for ever, felt the Muslim

64. BML, 08023 bb 17, INC, Address of Mazhar-ul-Haque, Lucknow, 1916.

65. Ibid, Address of Sarojini Naidu, Lucknow, 1916.

leaders. It would be too late if the League should wait till the peace had been signed in order to start a discussion about the future of the country. To many [in the League, the war-time appeared to be the most opportune moment to press for the demands. "The Indian public man who has grasped the psychology of the existing conditions, and yet helps to waste through a policy of masterly inactivity the all too brief interlude for planning and preparation, is a traitor to the cause of India," said Nabiullah, the chairman of the reception committee of the League at Lucknow.<sup>66</sup> Major changes in the administration were inevitable, and a new order of things had to come through the united efforts of the intellectual and political leaders of the whole people. To determine those changes, the people should end their own differences, and participate actively in working out a common future.

"The affairs of the country which we Moslems are proud to call our motherland," said Nabiullah, "have reached a stage, where they call for the sinking of all petty differences of race and creed and demand united action . . . The future of India hangs in the balance . . . Need India wait for an answer from the followers of Islam in this great crisis of her fate? . . . Let me assure our fellow countrymen of other creeds, that a Mussalman cannot betray the cause of India without betraying his whole past. He shall, God willing, be in the vanguard of the forces that are to fight the battles of our constitutional freedom. His active political life is of a short duration, but during this brief period he has traversed the ground that the great Hindu Community took about a quarter of a century to cover. The history of the All-India Moslem League is a faithful reflex of the political growth of Indian Mussalmans."<sup>67</sup>

Muhammad Ali Jinnah presided over the League. Though comparatively young, he already come to occupy an important place in India's public life. 'His clear gaze and ripe judgment, his cool, imperturbable temper, his sweet reasonableness, his fearless courage and devotion to duty have stood the test through serious crises in public affairs and have helped to save many an

66. BML, 08023 bb 17, ML, Address of Nabiullah, Lucknow, 1916.

67. Ibid.

awkward situation'. Jinnah was the link between the League and the Congress. In that important year in the political history of modern India, he played a major role in bringing the two organisations together as the ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity.

To Jinnah, the Indian political life was subjected to stupendous problems of passions, prejudices, personal idiosyncrasies, innumerable cross currents of desire, hope, fear and hate. These were not unnatural in a common secular existence of a vast population. The other complicating factor was the type of administration which prevailed, namely, an administration conducted by a trained body of English officials who 'are naturally conservative, have a rooted horror of bold administrative changes or constitutional experiments, are reluctant to part with power or associate Indians freely in the Government of the country'. This attitude caused enormous difficulties in the progress of the Indian nation. Yet, efforts for a final settlement had to be made.

In a most forceful presidential address, Jinnah condemned what he described as 'bastard and desperate political maxims' which were applied by the British against Indian nationalism. The rulers went by their belief that 'democratic institutions cannot thrive in the environment of the East', that 'the only form of Government suitable to India is an autocracy tempered by English efficiency and character', that 'the interests of the educated classes are opposed to those of the Indian masses and the former would oppress the latter if the strong protecting hands of the British official were withdrawn', and finally, that, 'Indians are unfit to govern themselves'. All these theories were demolished by Jinnah with convincing arguments. The advocates of the existing methods of Indian governance were warned by him to change their mentality and to forget their time-worn monopoly of political and bureaucratic authority. Jinnah gave the following call:

"Be the time near or distant the Indian people are bound to attain their full stature as a Self-Governing nation. No force in the world can rob them of their destiny and thwart the purposes of Providence . . . If the Indians are not the pariahs of nature, if they are not out of the pale of operation

of the laws that govern mankind elsewhere, if their minds can grow in knowledge and power and can think and plan and organise together for the common needs of the present and for the common hopes of the future, the only future for them is Self-Government, is the attainment of the power to apply through properly organised channels the common National will and intelligence to the needs and tasks of their National existence. The cant of unfitness must die, the laws of nature and the doctrines of common humanity are not different in the East.”<sup>68</sup>

Jinnah criticised the authorities for their reluctance to move a little faster. Mere sympathy, divorced from a desire to act, meant nothing for India. ‘Honeyed words alone cannot suffice. We may congratulate each other about a changed angle of vision and yet remaining where we are till doomsday.’ If the British stuck to their pre-supposition that India was not fit for Self-Government, she should be made fit for it, and that itself was the duty of the Government.

With the simultaneous assertion of their demand for Self-Government at the sessions of the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League, Indian Nationalism came to assume a more formidable character. The Congress resolutions were emphatic on the subject. They were: “That having regard to the fact that the great communities of India are the inheritors of ancient civilisations and have shown great capacity for government and administration . . . this Congress is of opinion that the time has come when His Majesty the King Emperor should be pleased to issue a proclamation announcing that it is the aim and intention of British policy to confer Self-Government on India at an early date.

“That this Congress demands that a definite step should be taken towards Self-Government by granting the reform contained in the scheme prepared by the All-India Congress committee in concert with the Reform Committee appointed by the All-India Moslem League.

“That in the reconstruction of the Empire, India shall be

68. BML, 08023 bb 17, ML, Presidential Address of M.A. Jinnah, Lucknow, December 1916.

lifted from the position of a dependency to that of an equal partner in the Empire with the self-governing Dominions.’<sup>69</sup>

By another significant resolution the Congress called upon the Congress Committees, the Home Rule Leagues, and other associations which believed in Self-Government ‘to carry through the year an educative propaganda on law-abiding and constitutional lines in support of the reforms put forward by the Indian National Congress and the Moslem League’.<sup>70</sup> This implied a political campaign all over the country during those tense days of the War when any such movement was bound to put the authorities in a difficult situation. The political workers were required to speak to the people against the Defence of India Act and other repressive measures since the Congress had taken a strong stand against those methods. “Sink all your differences in a supreme common cause. Unite and stand solidly shoulder to shoulder, resolve either to conquer or to die,” directed the Congress President.<sup>71</sup> Home Rule or Self-Rule, Swaraj or Self-Government, everything merged into a demand for something greater and more honourable. It was a demand of the whole people of India. “I feel that if the people are bitterly disappointed at this juncture it will mean the greatest disaster to the future progress of this country,” warned Jinnah.<sup>72</sup>

Soon after the Congress and League sessions at Lucknow, Tilak and Annie Besant started ‘a campaign of vigorous propaganda’ to present to the people the Congress-League scheme of constitutional reforms. The Government viewed the scheme with apprehension since it proposed to upset the existing balance by the creation of a large non-official majority in the Indian legislatures. Whatever be the nature of the demands, the main consideration before the authorities was whether those demands could at all be entertained at that particular time. The Viceroy Chelmsford made an appeal in the Imperial Legislative Council on 7 February 1917:

“Gentlemen, let me assure you that the expediency of

69. INC, Resolution XII, 1916.

70. INC, Resolution XIII, 1916.

71. CC, Address of Ambika Charan Mazumdar, Lucknow, 1916.

72. BML, 08023 bb 17, ML, M.A. Jinnah, Lucknow, 1916.

broadening the basis of Government, and the demand of Indians to play a greater part in the conduct of the affairs of this country, are not matters which have escaped our attention . . . If, gentlemen, after reading your morning newspaper, you pause for a moment to consider the vital and urgent questions which day by day engage the British Cabinet at the present juncture, I am sure the thought uppermost in your mind will be one of sympathy for the men engaged on the almost super human problem of mobilising the resources of our huge Empire in its gigantic task, and that you will not be disposed to cavil at the fact that the consideration of certain constitutional issues affecting a portion of that Empire has to yield place for a time in the presence of such vast responsibilities.”<sup>73</sup>

The Viceroy should have known that the leaders were not in a mood to respond to his advice. Political excitement was growing in the country. It seemed as if nothing could please the people except a prompt declaration of the aims and objectives of the Government regarding India's future. Small steps in that direction were equally unacceptable. For example, when the British Cabinet decided that India should be represented at the Imperial War Conference by two non-official Indians and one British administrator, in addition to the Secretary of State, the concession did not evoke any appreciation from any political circle. On the other hand, criticism was voiced that the so-called representatives were selected by the Government, and therefore, they did not command much popular confidence.

The War-time repressive measures in the name of order and stability were coming under increasing attack even from many moderates. The Press was kept so much in restriction under the Press Act of 1910 that free expression of political opinion became almost an impossible venture. Men like B.G. Horniman, Madan Mohan Malaviya, and C.T. Chintamani, among many others, reminded the Viceroy that the Press Act had remained in force for seven years against ‘the practically unanimous view of Indian opinion’, and that it had become a threat to any kind of writing since the provisions of the Act

73. CP, Mss, Eur. B 216, Speech of Lord Chelmsford in Imperial Legislative Council, 7 February 1917.

were being abused in the pretext of War emergencies. Even an English Chief Justice of Madras described the Act thus: "The terms of the section are extremely wide and comprehensive. They vest the Local Government with a discretion so large and unfettered that the keeping of printing presses and the publication of newspapers is becoming an extremely hazardous undertaking in this country . . . The vesting of much unlimited power in the Executive Government is undoubtedly a serious encroachment on the freedom which the Press in India enjoyed before the passing of the Act."<sup>74</sup>

Lord Chelmsford found it necessary to keep the Press under severe control, no matter what the public felt about it. He said he had evidence of the Press writing against the Government and also indulging in vilification of the authorities and even overt sedition. The Act was brought upon to check 'the flood that was spreading over the land'. The Government could not permit the Press to be free enough to discuss the War efforts of the Government, the nature of help that India was obliged to render to Britain, and the steps that were being taken to root out seditious designs of Indian revolutionaries.

By March 1917, the gallant Indian troops were making their triumphant progress in Mesopotamia. In its earlier phase, the Mesopotamia campaign was a great military tragedy. The fall of Kut marked the nadir of British fortunes. The army suffered greatly while facing the enemy on four fronts. The breakdown of medical services showed a disastrous inefficiency on the part of the Indian administration. The Mesopotamian summer had had its terrible effect on the troops. The sick and the wounded who were brought back to India could not be provided with necessary medical attention because of inadequate hospital facilities and insufficient provisions. At last when conditions improved and the Indian soldiers proved themselves capable of overcoming all difficulties, the Viceroy declared in the Imperial Legislative Council on 23 March 1917: "We have all admired the military skill and determination which has marked the leadership of our Army in the field, and we cannot

74. CP, Mss. Eur. B 216, see the Representation of the Press Association of India, 5 March 1917.

forget the gallantry and endurance of the troops throughout the operations which have taken place under the most trying conditions . . . History will some day record its verdict on these events and we are too near to them ourselves to be sure of our judgment.”<sup>75</sup>

While her troops saved the British prestige in one of the most ferocious battles of the First World War, the people of India were called upon to meet the increasing demands of War expenditure. Informing the Legislative Council of the Government decision to make a big financial offer, the Viceroy said: “This has been a notable session and Hon’ble Members have, I think, every reason to be gratified with it. They have signified in no uncertain manner their desire to associate India with the sacrifices which our Empire has had to make in connection with this War, and I am glad to think that the Government of India, in making their offer of £100 millions to the Imperial Government, did not misinterpret the wishes of this Council.”<sup>76</sup> The Council can only act as a rubber-stamp in matters of big imperial policies. If the Government made that offer, the Council had no other way but to approve of it. The decisions regarding India’s War offers were arrived at in the British Cabinet meetings where the Secretary of State was free to advance anything he deemed necessary. Parliament was informed of such decisions, and it approved of them in a customary way. Thus, much before the Viceroy informed the Imperial Legislative Council about that hundred-million pound-sterling Indian offer, the Secretary of State for India had moved it in the Commons and got it passed, and made it a *fait accompli*. It was on 14 March 1917 that the House of Commons endorsed the Indian contribution towards the cost of the War. The resolution of the Secretary of State said:

“That, whereas the Government of India, deeming the well-being and interests of the Indian Empire to be vitally concerned in the successful prosecution of the War, have recommended that a contribution charged on the Revenues of

75. CP, Mss. Eur. B 216, Lord Chelmsford in Imperial Legislative Council, 23 March 1917.

76. Ibid.



India should be made towards the expenses of the same, such contribution to consist of the sum of £100,000,000 to be provided in part from the proceeds of a loan to be raised in India and the remainder by assuming liability for interest on British War Loan of the required amount, and whereas this Contribution has been offered to His Majesty's Government and gratefully accepted by them, and the Government of India have now made provision by legislation and in their Revenue and Expenditure Estimates for meeting, by means of increased taxation and otherwise, the annual charge for interest and sinking fund in respect of the Contribution as aforesaid, this House consents that a Contribution of £100,000,000 charged on the Revenues of India shall be made towards the cost of the War."<sup>77</sup>

This was the latest, but not the last, big contribution which India was required to make. Up-to-date figures regarding India's War gifts were not kept or prepared, and the authorities admitted that, 'It is not desirable that the latest figures and the latest position should be revealed to the world'. The figures as were presented to the Commons were at the discretion of the Cabinet, and understandably, did not disclose the full picture. The Indian Military Budget in the year before the War amounted to £20,000,000. The Budget for 1917 was shown as £26,000,000. "Then there is manganese ore, salt petre, mica, shellac, jute bags, raw jute, tanning materials, wool, army blankets, oil seeds, wheat, rice, and forage. All these things we have drawn from India, and all these India has contributed to help the Empire in its struggle. The list of commodities is a long one, and it has recently been calculated that the value of the Indian exports of direct national importance is over £3,000,000 a month, a figure which may reach or even exceed £5,000,000 during the season of heavy wheat shipments. The significance of these figures will be appreciated when it is stated that the total value of Indian exports to all destinations is, roughly, £12,000,000 a month, and to his country (England) £4,000,000."<sup>78</sup> All these expenditures as also

77. PP, Commons, Resolution of the Secretary of State for India, 14 March 1917.

78. Ibid.

the contribution of £100,000,000 were met by new taxations.

While India made material contributions on a large scale, the achievements of her soldiers were spectacular and praiseworthy. The Secretary of State informed the House: "Indian troops have fought, I think, in almost every theatre of the War—in France, in Egypt, at Aden, on the Suez Canal, in Gallipoli, in East Africa, and in West Africa . . . They were the first of the overseas troops. The Indian Army provided the first defence of British East Africa, and repelled the first Turkish attack on the Suez Canal. The Army in Mesopotamia, which in the last few days has retrieved—how gloriously retrieved!—the check and misfortunes of our earlier operations, and which has struck a blow that resounds throughout the whole of the Eastern world, and not the Eastern world alone, is an Army which, from first to last, through all its sufferings, hardships, and disappointments—and in its triumphs!—is in the main an Indian Army based upon India."<sup>79</sup>

Parliament heard many aspects of the splendid and heroic services of the Indian troops. It also heard about the efforts all classes of people, from the highest to the lowest, in all parts of the empire, without distinction of class, or caste, or religion, to help in the War efforts. To Asquith it was an example of 'few parallels in the history of the world'. "This House," he said, "speaking as they do in the heart and centre of the Empire as a whole, pay a willing and affectionate debt of gratitude to our Indian fellow-subjects for the magnificent way in which they have rallied to our Imperial cause."<sup>80</sup> The Prime Minister Lloyd George, too, was full of appreciation and admiration. He showed how anxious he was 'to get the goodwill, the sympathy, the zeal, the enthusiasm of India, particularly at this moment'. "But are you giving them Home Rule?" asked one of the Members.<sup>81</sup>

India was anxious not for praise, but for promises. When

79. PP, Commons, Resolution of the Secretary of State for India, 14 March 1917.

80. PP, Commons, Speech of Asquith, 14 March 1917.

81. PP, Commons, see the arguments of Mr. Barton in criticising Government on its policy on Excise Duties, 14 March 1917.

none was forthcoming, the Congress and the leaders of the Home Rule movement resorted to a more aggressive propaganda to create opinion in favour of their demands. Tilak and Annie Besant mobilised a good number of followers to carry on a campaign which, while drawing the people's attention towards India's legitimate political demands, brought to light much of the duplicity on the part of the British, in exploiting India's resources only to deceive the people when the victory came. The number of persons actively interested in political work in India was growing rapidly. They were critical of the indirect and direct suffering to which the country had been subjected because of the War. Economic hardships arising out of mounting pressures on national resources were felt by the whole nation. When these sufferings were discussed in the light of the British antipathy towards nationalist desires, feelings of the people rose high against the Government. 'The mere fact that the Allies were avowedly fighting in defence of the rights of small and weak nations against large and strong ones; the frequent references by Allied statesmen to such terms as democracy and self-determination; the strong world-movement towards government by popular opinion—all these combined to raise vague hopes and to stimulate discontent with the existing polity in India.'<sup>82</sup> The harsh attitude of the Government even towards normal situations also provoked good deal of resentment. For example, when Gandhi, in his role as a social reformer, proceeded to Champaran in Bihar to inquire into the grievances of the labourers engaged on indigo cultivation, the Government treated him in a manner which undermined the people's faith in the British sense of justice. Gandhi had gone there more or less accidentally, and had looked upon his work more as a humanitarian mission than a political campaign. But, he was served with an order to leave the district. Gandhi refused to obey the order. He made a statement in the Court on 18 April 1917 in which he 'defined for the first time in India the moral basis of disobedience to authority'. He was not going to yield 'not for want of respect for lawful authority, but in obedience of the higher law of our

82. IOL, SW 24/1917-1918, no. 54.

being—the voice of conscience'.<sup>83</sup> It was Gandhi's first Satyagraha on the soil of India.

Gandhi was steadily emerging as a national leader. He was in close touch with various leaders like Tilak, Annie Besant, Lala Lajpat Rai, Madan Mohan Malaviya and others, and also attracted many followers including Vinoba Bhave, Mahadev Desai, Rajendra Prasad, J.B. Kripalani, C.F. Andrews, and others. He thus injected a new vigour into the Indian political life. For the Government, more anxious moments were in store.

By the middle of 1917, the Indian restlessness was proving to be alarming for the authorities. The Governor of Madras and the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab sought to curb the political uneasiness by a recourse to strongarm policy. Suspicion spread that the Government had an ulterior motive in putting down all types of political activities in a ruthless manner. A close watch was kept on the youth in the educational institutions, and this again, aggravated the situation further. In those circumstances, the Home Rule campaign assumed a more powerful character and the Government found no other alternative but to resist its growing threat. In May 1917, the Governor of Madras Lord Pentland warned the Home Rule leaders to desist from 'the violent methods which were being employed' in their campaign for creating revolutionary tendencies among the common people. The Governor made personal efforts to dissuade Annie Besant from carrying her movement further, but neither the warning nor attempts at persuasion yielded any result. So, at last, on 16 June 1917, a restrictive order was served on Mrs. Besant and her lieutenants, Arundale and Wadia not to make speeches or attend meetings, but to remain confined to the hill resort of Ootacamund.

This action was bound to provoke protest. The Home Rule movement received an impetus as protest meetings began to be organised at several places. 'Home Rulers announced their intention of fighting out once for all the question whether self-government was a legitimate aspiration for India or not; and

83. CW, vol. XIII, Preface.

under their guidance this issue was placed in the forefront of the agitation. It was feared that the anticipated campaign of repression had really begun.<sup>84</sup> The Government argued that it was impossible to permit popular excitement which the Home Rule people were fomenting against the regime in the midst of a great war by use of violent language and by resorting to inflammatory language in discussing political questions. These arguments fell on deaf ears, and the extremists proceeded to make capital out of the issue of internment. The cause of many internees including Mrs. Besant, became the cause of all freedom-loving people. Protest meetings spread to all parts of India. On 7 July 1917 Gandhi addressed the following letter to the private secretary to the Viceroy:

"I write this regarding the Annie Besant agitation . . . In my humble opinion, the internments are a big blunder. Madras was absolutely calm before them. Now it is badly disturbed. India as a whole had not made common cause with Mrs. Besant but now she is on a fair way towards commanding India's identity with her methods . . . I myself do not like much in Mrs. Besant's method. I have not liked the idea of the political propaganda being carried on during the War. In my opinion, our restraint will have been the best propaganda. But the whole country was against me. And no one could deny Mrs. Besant's great sacrifice and love for India or her desire to be strictly constitutional, nor could the country's right to carry on the propaganda be denied if it chose to do so. Many of us have respectfully differed from Mrs. Besant but all have recognised her powers and devotion. The Congress was trying to 'capture' Mrs. Besant. The latter was trying to 'capture' the former. Now they have almost become one. I plead with all the earnestness I can command for the boldest policy; i.e., to acknowledge the blunder in the frankest manner and to withdraw the orders of internment and to declare that the country has the right to carry on any propaganda that is not subversive of the British Constitution and is totally free from violence."<sup>85</sup>

84. IOL, SW 24/1917-18, no. 54.

85. CW, vol. XIII, Gandhi to the Viceroy's Private Secretary, 7 July 1917.

Gandhi was no less worried than the Viceroy over the cult of violence which would certainly spread if wise counsels did not prevail. There was little chance of an armed confrontation with governmental forces, but secret violence could not be prevented if the people's anger crossed the limits. Already there were signs that young people all over the country, were going in that direction. Gandhi, though disapproving of violence, was equally against asking his countrymen to be silent spectators to the acts of injustice which the authorities perpetrated. "I have presented to the youths and to Indians in general in my humble way a better and more effective method and that is the method of soul force or truth force or love force which for want of a better term I have described as passive resistance," he said.<sup>86</sup>

Active or passive, any resistance at that moment was against the British interests. The Home Rule leaders, after Annie Besant's internment, made a common cause with the internment of Muhammed Ali and Shaukat Ali, who were under severe restrictions for their sympathy to the Sultan of Turkey, the enemy of the King-Emperor. In the heat of excitement, the Hindus and the Muslims, the extremists and the moderates, and all other patriotic forces came forward to forge a common demand against the Government which caused grave concern to the authorities. The Secretary of State for India, Austen Chamberlain, had clearly proved his inability to cope with the developing situation. Without a definite guideline from home, Lord Chelmsford too found himself unable to move energetically in the face of the fast gathering political storm.

In July 1917, Austen Chamberlain resigned. The only English statesman whose appointment as the Secretary of State for India would satisfy the Indian leaders was obviously E.S. Montagu. His progressive views on constitutional matters were already known to the people. Furthermore, a change of personalities in that supreme office at that critical time was indicative of a change in the policies; this was expected to

86. CW, vol. XIII, Gandhi to the Viceroy's Private Secretary, 7 July 1917.

create hopes in India, which, in turn, was likely to keep the country quiet at least for some time. In one of his very first letters to the new Secretary of State, the Viceroy informed: "It is impossible for us to sit down under the campaign of cruel and calculated calumny of British rule and British officials. We have tolerated it longer perhaps than we should, but the limit has we think been reached."<sup>87</sup> Montagu assured the Viceroy: "It is a trying time in every sense of the word for all connected with the Government of India, and I am sure that you will not require any assurance of my sympathy."<sup>88</sup> Montagu was not a stranger to Indian affairs. He was very much aware of the difficulties of the situation. Immediate action was the need of the hour. The Viceroy, in his very first telegram to Montagu, conveyed an invitation to visit India so that they could discuss the grave problems which faced the empire, and the Secretary of State considered the proposal seriously and carefully.

Montagu's immediate task was to examine various reform proposals with which Indian administration and public opinion were concerned. He also decided to discuss the issues with persons in England who were competent to give sound advice. The Home Rule movement and the agitation against internment of leaders had disturbed many people in England, and they expected the new Secretary of State to initiate a bolder policy. "There seems to me," said Montagu, "to be only one thing to be done: to try to get our announcement about reforms at the earliest possible moment and to consider the effect that the announcement has on the general situation."<sup>89</sup> He hastily drafted a memorandum for the consideration of the Cabinet. It was meant to be merely a policy declaration and not a scheme of reform; but, the declaration was expected to give hopes for a bigger step.

As regards the reform itself, Montagu was prepared to think of 'bold and radical measures' both at the top and at the bottom. There was no time to effect reforms only at the local

87. MCC, Mss. Eur. D 523/6, Chelmsford to Montagu, 19 July 1917.

88. Ibid, D 523/1, Montagu to Chelmsford, 21 July 1917.

89. Ibid, 3 August 1917.

level or at the central level; changes should come at every level. As he put it to the Viceroy: "If twenty-five years ago Local Governments, Municipal Boards and the restored Panchayat had been more vigorously developed, our top building might be in a happier position, but as I think you will agree, now we have got to make great progress in the whole building on all floors."<sup>90</sup> Whatever be the Indian demands, Montagu wanted to establish direct contact with the leaders of India to ascertain their desires. He became rather eager to visit India at the earliest and convinced the Cabinet of the importance of the visit.

A declaration could not be delayed further. It was to be brief but significant. Montagu's assessment of the Indian demands led him to believe that the people wanted complete relaxation of the British authority, leading to a growth of full-fledged representative institutions. It was of course too radical a proposal. He began to think of a gradual and increasing decentralisation. 'As we give more functions to Local Governments and the Local Governments are more and more responsible to the people through the Legislative Councils, we must give more and more responsibility to India and keep less here', he felt.

He prepared his now well-known announcement on these lines to calm the Indian excitement. When on 20 August 1917, Charles Robert questioned the Secretary of State in the House of Commons if 'he is in a position to make any announcement as to the policy which the Government intend to pursue in India?', Montagu gave this famous reply:

"The Government of India have for some time been urging that a statement should be made in regard to Indian policy, and I am glad to have the opportunity, offered by my hon. Friend's question, of meeting their wishes. The policy of His Majesty's Government, with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration, and the gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible Government in India as

90. MCC, Mss. Eur. D 523/1, Montagu to Chelmsford, 3 August 1917.



an integral part of the British Empire. They have decided that substantial steps in this direction should be taken as soon as possible, and that it is of the highest importance, as a preliminary to considering what these steps should be, that there should be a free and informal exchange of opinion between those in authority at home and in India. His Majesty's Government have accordingly decided, with His Majesty's approval, that I should accept the Viceroy's invitation to proceed to India to discuss these matters with the Viceroy and the Government of India, to consider with the Viceroy the views of local Governments, and to receive with him the suggestions of representative bodies and others."<sup>91</sup>

The Secretary of State added that the progress of that policy could only be achieved by successive stages. The British Government and the Government of India, on whom the responsibility lay for the welfare and advancement of the Indian peoples, should be "the judges of the time and measure of each advance, and they must be guided by the co-operation received from those upon whom new opportunities of service will thus be conferred, and by the extent to which it is found that confidence can be reposed in their sense of responsibility."<sup>92</sup>

Montagu promised adequate opportunity for a public discussion of the proposals and also Parliament's ultimate right to approve them in due process. He was congratulated for 'the very far-reaching statement of policy' which he made in the Commons, and he announced in the House that the statement was also being announced in India the same day.

The Montagu announcement was received in India with mixed feelings of hopes and disappointment. To the moderates, it was like the 'Magna Carta of India'. They asked for the release of the internees as a proof of the honest intentions of the authorities. Simultaneously they decided to build public opinion all over the country in support of their demands in view of the impending visit of the Secretary of State. The extremists, on the other hand, felt unhappy that the announce-

91. PP, Commons, Statement of E.S. Montagu, 20 August 1917.

92. Ibid.

ment was cautious and guarded, and fell far short of their expectations. To them, therefore, there was no other alternative but to carry on the agitation as vigorously as before. The politics of the National Congress thus once again ran into a confusing phase, with a split threatening the rank and file of the Indian nationalists on the question of the Montagu proposals.

That the announcement of Montagu was vague, no one disputed. Even the Viceroy gave his frank opinion, when he informed Montagu about the Indian reaction. He wrote:

"The announcement of the goal and of your visit is the outstanding subject of interest to us all. I think I may say it has been taken well, but we have still to see what order goes round from the extremist leaders. They have been taken by surprise and have not yet had time to consider their attitude. I believe myself that they will hold their judgment in suspense, for they are anxious to carry the moderates with them. I am extremely grateful to you for having secured this statement of policy from the Cabinet. It comes from them as a final and authoritative decision. I am still of opinion that, if I had made such an announcement of my own, even in identical terms, there would at once have been an outcry against its vagueness and want of a definite policy, and there would have been a demand for an appeal to Caesar... Now it is 'Hookum'. The Cabinet Lord Sahib has spoken it, from whom there is no appeal, and the East accepts the final utterance."<sup>93</sup>

The Viceroy also realised that his position in India was going to be somewhat compromised because of the proposed visit of the Secretary of State to study the Indian situation. All attention would now turn to the White Mughal who was coming from the Centre of the British Empire armed with superior authority as the powerful Minister of the British Crown. For any Viceroy, the presence of his master in his own domain would surely reduce his own status. No doubt, Lord Chelmsford had extended the invitation to the Minister to visit India, but yet, the actual coming was a different matter from a formal invitation. The Viceroy, however, satisfied himself that 'these are exceptional times and exceptional

measures are required'. In any case, in view of the time being short before them, the Indian administration was ordered to get ready with 'all the Reform policies which hold the field' and to chalk out a programme to enable the Secretary of State to see all important leaders. The Viceroy, of course, reserved his own right and the right of the Local Governments to select the persons or parties for an interview with the Secretary. If it was not done, the visit was bound 'to be prolonged beyond the stage of endurance and certainly beyond that of usefulness'.

In India, the central issue still remained the release of Annie Besant. Though she was still confined to Ootacamund, the Congress extremists proposed her name as the next President of the Indian National Congress to demonstrate their protest against the repressive policy of the Government. This was not acceptable to some of the moderates, but the need of the hour was to present a united stand and impress upon the Secretary of State the strength and determination of the Congress. Hence the name of Annie Besant was accepted unanimously for the presidency.

In the Imperial Legislative Council at Simla, on 5 September 1917, Muhammad Ali Jinnah asked: "In view of the recent announcement and also the proposed visit of Mr. Montagu and having regard to the feelings which have been aroused in this country by the internment of Mrs. Besant and her co-workers, do the Government of India propose to consider the question of their release?"<sup>94</sup> On behalf of the Government, Sir William Vincent replied that the Government of India were prepared to recommend to the Government of Madras to remove the restrictions placed on Mrs. Besant and her colleagues if the Government were satisfied that they would abstain from unconstitutional and violent methods of political agitation during the remainder of the War. Jinnah also pleaded for the release of Muhammed Ali and Shaukat Ali, and the Government assured that they were already considering the cases and enquiring into them. The Viceroy narrated before the Council how his Government was anxious for constitutional reforms and how they were busy in formulating the

94. Proceedings of Imperial Legislative Council, 5 September 1917.

proposals. All that he wanted at that moment was that when the Secretary of State arrived 'he should find a calm atmosphere, suggested policies carefully thought-out and supported by sober arguments and concrete facts, and a spirit of sobriety dominating everyone worthy of the issues to be examined'. He also appealed:

"At this great epoch in your national evolution I earnestly appeal for co-operation. Let us look upon the bitternesses of the past merely as the growing pains of a great people straining towards fuller development. Believe me, the years of guardianship and tutelage have not been so barren as some would have us think. The pace of India's political growth as measured by the development of her political machinery may have seemed slow, but who would deny that meanwhile her intellectual, economic, and national faculties have gone on from strength to strength?

"For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,

"Seem here no painful inch to gain,

"Far back through creeks and inlets making,

"Comes silent, flooding in, the main."<sup>95</sup>

It was known to the authorities that the Montagu mission would carry the country nowhere unless all the issues were approached in a spirit of understanding and in an atmosphere of mutual confidence. "Let us then sit down together as friends, mindful of old historic associations, harbouring no mistrust, and let us examine these great problems solely from the standpoint of what is judicious, what is practicable, and, above all, what is right," said the Viceroy.<sup>96</sup>

Mrs. Besant was released from her confinement. The Viceroy claimed that she had let him know that she would co-operate in creating a calm atmosphere for Montagu's visit. "I accept Mrs. Besant's word, and I am sure her remarkable energies will be directed in the way she has indicated. But, Gentlemen, while our policy has been conciliatory, it must not be supposed we have altered in any degree our attitude

95. CP, Mss. Eur. B 216, Viceroy's Speech at Imperial Legislative Council, 5 September 1917.

96. Ibid.

towards the forces of disorder," warned the Viceroy.<sup>97</sup>

It was not really because of Montagu's visit that Mrs. Besant was released. It was because of the fear of extremist agitation which alarmed the Government. When her name had already been proposed for the next President of the Congress, her continued detention would only lead to serious protests and widespread agitation. The Viceroy was right in his views that 'the advantages of releasing her outweighed the disadvantages'.<sup>98</sup> But, in the extremist political circles, her release was interpreted as a reflection of the weakness of the Government, and thus a triumph for the nationalists. As such, they felt encouraged to demand the release of the Ali Brothers as well.

Many in British Parliament felt dissatisfied over the manner in which a great leap was being taken in Indian policies. Any sign of weakness when strength was needed, could lead to greater trouble in future. Information reached some Members that Mrs. Besant, since her release, was going about from place to place stirring up agitation, and declaring openly that 'she has entered into no conditions whatever with regard to her release'. Her visits to various places were described as 'a triumphant tour through India'. The Secretary of State was criticised for having displayed administrative weakness, and was cautioned against steps which might further weaken the imperial strength. Regarding his impending visit to India, Montagu was told:

"He is going out to India as a missionary of peace and goodwill. He is responsible for the Government not only of the extremists in India, but also of the loyal Indians—the extremists number from 5,000 to 10,000 at the outside, while the whole population totals fully 300,000,000 . . . What I am asking my right hon. Friend to do is to make a statement here before he goes to India that he will assuage as far as he can the ferment which has undoubtedly arisen in the Anglo-Indian community by assuring us that he is not going to India

97. CP, Mss. Eur. B 216, Viceroy's Speech at Imperial Legislative Council, 26 September 1917.

98. MCC, Mss. Eur. D 523/6, Chelmsford to Montagu, 22 September 1917.

to express any such ideas as Home Rule for India, and that he will show that he has no sympathy with Mrs. Besant or with the extremist agitation or with any idea of Home Rule for India, at all events during this War.”<sup>99</sup>

✓ In course of discussions cautioning Montagu, Sir John Jardine made this interesting comment which, in one sense or other, reflected the feeling of many Members of Parliament. “There is no question that anybody in India may discuss forms of Government, Home Rule, or anything else. It is just as it was said when Sir Charles Dilke was speaking in favour of Republicanism. It is reasonable enough so long as it is treated as a theoretical discussion of the best forms of Government.”<sup>100</sup> Was India prepared to indulge in a mere theoretical exercise when expectations were running high for practical achievements? It was not for nothing that a good number of Indian revolutionaries looked at the Montagu mission with suspicion that its real purpose was to keep India calm when the issue of victory or defeat in the War hung in balance.

Montagu himself was not very optimistic at the approach of his Indian tour. He knew the limitations in the conduct of his difficult mission. The British conservatism and Indian optimism were too far apart to be bridged to pave for a common meeting ground. To search for a practical compromise between irreconcilable ideologies required superhuman efforts which no British Minister or Viceroy was singularly endowed with. Montagu was afraid of the Indian extremists who were not satisfied with the British offer of a political dialogue. “You find me,” he wrote to Chelmsford, “rather depressed about the situation as regards India. I am constantly being told that the younger men among the educated classes have lost all faith in the bona fides of the Government. I don’t know why this should be so, but people are constantly telling me that never was the Government so unpopular as it is to-day . . . Complaints reached me that all educated Indians are viewed with suspicion by the Civil Servant and that there has been a wave of distrust

99. PP, Commons, see Discussion on Political Agitation, Speech of Johnson-Hicks, 16 October 1917.

100. PP, Commons, Sir John Jardine, 16 October 1917.

among Government 'officials' which has caused resentment and bitterness among the young Indians . . . The older men among the educated Indians—the Moderates—complain vigorously that the Government does not take them up and that therefore they are compelled, unless they wish to lose all influence and become completely isolated, to throw in their lot with the younger, less educated and impetuous men."<sup>101</sup>

The attitude of the Muslims towards the British in general and Montagu's proposed peace overture in particular did not seem favourable or cordial because of the military misfortunes which Turkey suffered in the War. The conservative section in Muslim leadership was loath to separate religion from politics, and hence they were not enthusiastic about Home Rule or representative systems when the fate of the Caliph looked uncertain. The conservative Muslims not only grew indifferent towards political developments, but were also critical of the Hindu apathy towards the fate of their spiritual head, the Caliph. Unfortunately for both the Congress and the League, the communal riots which erupted in Bihar in September-October 1917, commonly known at that time as the Bakr-Id Riots, disturbed the Hindu-Muslim relations to a large extent.\* Many Muslims doubted if a joint political programme at the top could at all safeguard the minority privileges in view of religious antagonism between the two communities at the lowest level.

On the whole, the national political scene as well as the Indo-British relations entered a very complicated phase when Montagu landed on the soil of India to search for a political solution. His was no easy task.

Montagu maintained a diary while touring Egypt and the Indian provinces between 28 October 1917 and 28 March 1918, and also while preparing his report on the Indian constitutional reforms. It is an interesting piece of writing which reveals the currents and cross-currents of the Indo-British

101. MCC, Mss. Eur. D 523/1, Montagu to Chelmsford, 4 October 1917.

\* The Bakr-Id Riots occurred because of Hindu resentment against cow-sacrifice by Muslims in their annual festival called Bakr-Id. It took a serious turn in Bihar where the minority community suffered badly.

political activities in those difficult days of the War, and the principles and politics of the distinguished personalities who dominated the Indian scene.

Within a few weeks of his journey through India, Montagu realised at least three things. First, it was difficult to subdue the revolutionary spirit of India by force or strength, and if it was attempted, every suppressed revolutionary would inspire many to follow his path. Looking at the beautiful rock carvings of the Elephanta Caves and told of the life of *Shiva* as depicted there, he wrote:

"I particularly liked that *Shiva* who cut his wife into 52 pieces, only to discover that he had 52 wives! This is really what happens to the Government of India when it interns Mrs. Besant."<sup>102</sup> Not in the case of Mrs. Besant alone, the result would be same in the case of any great leader. Secondly, it was difficult for a progressive Secretary of State to rely on the Indian bureaucracy headed by the Viceroy, and it was much more difficult to understand their attitude and intentions. Obviously, they played a hide and seek game with Montagu on the question of constitutional changes and they worried how far their own prestige would be affected. "I do not know what Chelmsford is playing at," he began to brood.<sup>103</sup> As days passed, Montagu discovered with deep anguish how the Indian Government was playing games with him till the last moment. Thirdly, of the large number of persons he was obliged to meet, many were simpletons, brought to him by local Governments to present views which were not their own. Referring to a single day's experience, Montagu complained: "I came back after lunch, and we had three interviews about which I protested to Willingdon . . . two men from a district who could hardly speak English and had nothing to say, and a Mahommedan Holy Man, who spoke through an interpreter, and also had nothing to say."<sup>104</sup>

While Montagu was busy with his mission, the National Congress met in Calcutta on 26-29 December 1917 with Annie

102. SRO, MTA, 30 December 1917.

103. Ibid.

104. Ibid.



Besant as President. Of Irish descent, mystical and contemplative in temperament, trained in radical politics and influenced in early life by Charles Bradlaugh, a free thinker and a friend of the Indian people, an advocate of the Home Rule and a political sufferer because of her progressive opinion, Mrs. Besant was at that moment at the height of her fame and popularity. "For the first time in Congress history," she said, "you have chosen as your President one who, when your choice was made, was under the heavy ban of Government displeasure, and who lay interned as a person dangerous to public safety. While I was humiliated, you crowned me with honour; while I was slandered, you believed in my integrity and good faith; while I was crushed under the heel of bureaucratic power, you acclaimed me as your leader; while I was silenced and unable to defend myself you defended me, and won for me release."<sup>105</sup>

The main issue before the Congress was to press its demand for Home Rule as essential and vital, as the birthright of the Indian nation. Emphatic assertions were made in that regard by the stalwarts of the movement. "It is in human nature to fret against oppression and tyranny, it is in human nature to give free vent to our feelings, it is in human nature to chafe against repression; and if our rulers will shut the gates of fair criticism, fair play and justice, it will be in human nature also to try to force the gate open," declared Fazlul Haq.<sup>106</sup> Tilak said: "My definition of Home Rule is a simple one: and every one, even a peasant can understand it. Home Rule is 'to be in my own country what Englishmen are in England and in the colonies' . . . I must be master in my own country, in the same sense as an Englishman is master in his own."<sup>107</sup> "We are all agreed as to the great ideal," said C.R. Das. "Let us gather strength to fight for it—let us fight for it with all our might and let us not rest content till the whole thing is granted to us, viz., Responsible Government in the Provinces, Responsible Government in Imperial matters—till the whole of the Govern-

105. CC, Address of Annie Besant, December 1917.

106. CC, Fazlul Haq, December 1917.

107. CC, B.G. Tilak, December 1917.

ment is put into the hands of the people.”<sup>108</sup> Muhammad Ali Jinnah, in a more practical manner, demanded:

“We desire that the attainment of complete Responsible Government should be laid down in the Statute and not left to the will of any party, and it is for that purpose that we say that a time-limit should be stated in the Statute itself so that, automatically, the one step we propose in the scheme of reform will lead to the next step till complete Responsible Government is established by the Statute itself.”<sup>109</sup>

The Congress, in a formal sense, extended its most cordial welcome to E.S. Montagu with the hope that his visit would convince him of the supreme necessity of granting India responsible Government.<sup>110</sup> It also appealed to the Government to release the Ali Brothers who had remained incarcerated since October 1914 and at that time were kept interned ‘because of religious scruples which they hold in common with the whole of Islam in India and elsewhere and which are not incompatible with loyalty to the King-Emperor’.<sup>111</sup>

The Congress-League Scheme was the trumpcard of the Congress. It was reaffirmed with greater emphasis as the minimum which India could expect and accept. To impress Montagu of the Congress determination, simultaneous meetings were organised all over India to read out Annie Besant’s presidential address to assert ‘the right of India to receive immediately the constitutional concessions embodied in the Congress-League Scheme, together with a promise of complete Home Rule in five or ten years’.<sup>112</sup> The Press played its expected role in propagating the Congress determination among a wider public. The Congress organisation was clearly under the control of the extremists when Montagu was going about his mission.

It may be pointed out here that at the close of 1917 when expectations were running high because of Montagu’s visit, Sir Sydney Rowlatt came to India to investigate into the question

108. CC, C.R. Das, December 1917.

109. CC, M.A. Jinnah, December 1917.

110. INC, Resolution IV, 1917.

111. INC, Resolution V, 1917.

112. IOL, SW 24/1917-18, no. 54.

of the internees and to devise a policy with regard to their future after the War. When he met Montagu to discuss the matter, the Secretary explained to him that "Government by means of internment and police was naturally a delightful method which built up only trouble probably for our successors."<sup>113</sup> It was in fact a major decision to 'appoint an extremely authoritative Committee to investigate in the fullest possible manner all the evidence bearing upon the sedition movement in India'. Rowlatt headed this Committee. Nobody could imagine at that time that all that Montagu was doing to pacify India in an earnest manner would be exploded by the acts of Sir Sydney and, that too, not in the distant future.

"We start the New Year with the usual uninterrupted sunshine, but in the middle of gloomy War news," wrote Montagu greeting 1918.<sup>114</sup> The War had reached its most decisive point. For the Allied Powers, the collapse of the Tsarist Russia in the face of Bolshevik Revolution made the situation most difficult. The German armies were pulled out of the Russian fronts and deployed on other fronts to the disadvantage of the Allied forces. The Viceroy issued a warning that India 'must be prepared for greater efforts and greater sacrifices, for more effective organisation of her military resources in manpower and in material'.<sup>115</sup>

But Indian economy was already at a breaking point under the heavy obligations of War. Depending on outside sources for two essential commodities, namely, salt and cloth, the common people of India were faced with a sudden rise in prices of those daily necessities caused by the disruption of the British shipping by the submarine warfare of Germany. The prices of other goods too were rising steadily. The heavy burden of taxation, rising prices, scarcity of essential goods and other economic distresses made the people restless. In February 1918, the Viceroy made a frank confession in the Imperial Legislative Council:

"We have been engaged in the struggle now for 3½ years,

113. SRO, MTA, 30 December 1917.

114. Ibid, 1 January 1918.

115. IOL, SW 24/1917-18, no. 54.

and hitherto India has not felt the burden and suffering which War brings into the houses of the poor with anything like the same severity as less favoured countries nearer the main theatres of operations. But the pinch is at last beginning to be felt, and one of the matters which has given my Government cause for the most anxious consideration has been the recent rise in the price of many of the necessities of life . . . The rise has been world-wide, but I think you will not question me when I say that in respect of some articles (I am thinking at the moment particularly of salt) the market rates which have recently been prevalent have soared far higher than could be justified by economic circumstances. Salt and clothing are among the prime necessities of life, and the prices at which they have been sold have pressed with great hardship on the poorer classes in this country. The discontent and uneasiness to which this has given rise have resulted in several regrettable instances of lawlessness in parts of Bengal, Bombay, Bihar and Assam.”<sup>116</sup>

The only way to keep India calm in the midst of mounting economic strain and political trouble was to divert the attention of the different political forces towards Montagu's visit. Burdened in the meantime with interviews, addresses, representations, deputations and the related paraphernalia, the Secretary of State was gradually finding himself more and more in a mess from which it was difficult to find a way out. While from the Indian side, he received ideas in great abundance, from the side of his own English colleagues, he was getting confused ideas of uncertain value; and, whenever any concrete suggestion was put before them for opinion, they at once began to contradict each other with conflicting views. The Viceroy himself was adding to his problems, and he disappointed the Secretary of State at every stage of their dialogue. What Montagu thought of Chelmsford was “that he is not as straight as I had always willingly given him credit for or that he is the stupidest man conceivable.”<sup>117</sup> He felt anxious, and when he confronted the Government of India on several issues,

116. CP, Mss. Eur. B 216, Lord Chelmsford, 6 February 1918.

117. SRQ, MTA, Delhi, 10-11 January 1918.

he was sorry for the disunion among the Indian bureaucrats, and at times felt depressed enough to note: "O! my God, I do not know whether I should not go home at once, frankly confess I have failed, and turn my attention to smashing the whole concern."<sup>118</sup> For three days he was negotiating with Chelmsford and his colleagues in Delhi, and he regarded that period as the 'blackest I have ever known'. The leaders of the English opinion in India, men like Woollacott, the correspondent of the *Times* in Delhi created difficulties for Montagu by being 'wholly against Indian aspirations'. And, among the leading administrators, there were persons who paid little or no regard for the feelings or desires of the Secretary of State. "We have just had a violent Note in from O'Dwyer damning our scheme all the way up hill and down dale; a Note from Robertson saying he does not like it; and a Note from Pentland saying he has no time to express any opinions at all. Certainly O'Dwyer's Note is very strange when one considers that he promised to support, and said he did support, Chelmsford's policy and the pronouncement of the 20th August. This is the difficulty we are always in," noted Montagu one of those days.<sup>119</sup>

Men like O'Dwyer who were unlikely to change their views no matter what the statesmen of the hour felt, were a liability for British empire because of their repressive policies. "He is determined," noted Montagu after talking to O'Dwyer, "to maintain his position as the idol of the reactionary forces, and to try and govern by the iron hand. He is not really a very good specimen, and his Simian-like appearance shows, I think, a low order of intelligence."<sup>120</sup> The tragedy of Jallianwalabagh which came in the wake of Montagu mission earned for O'Dwyer a lasting name as a stern administrator who believed that ruthlessness was the only way to keep a subject population under control. To what extent were men like him responsible for helping the Indian revolution on its relentless march, needs no emphasis. While O'Dwyer might be taken

118. SRO, MTA, Delhi, 10-11 January 1918.

119. Ibid, 15 January 1918.

120. Ibid, 21 January 1918.

as an exception in view of the exceptional circumstances prevailing in the Punjab, the other English Governors and Lieutenant-Governors, by their inelastic attitude towards any change and bitter opposition to any political concessions proved that they too belonged to the same school of thought. In other words, most of them preferred to remain where they were, ready to face any agitation with a show of force. A similar mentality had also overtaken many members of the Viceroy's Council. For example, William Vincent warned Montagu that disorder would follow the reforms, and declared in a violent speech that 'he could never sign his name to any of the proposals'. "Really Vincent is monstrous," noted a surprised Montagu. "He has been on our delegation and has been a party to all our discussions, and if he was going to run counter to everything that either the Government of India or I proposed he ought to have warned us. It was a treacherous speech."<sup>121</sup> And what about Lord Chelmsford himself? "I really find myself despairing of this man," wrote Montagu. "I have sent him new suggestion after new suggestion, and I find that the ten days has produced no corresponding thought of any kind whatever from him: he has done nothing, except sit and wait to be fed, and then even does not criticise. Well, it cannot be helped; I have got to go alone."<sup>122</sup>

Of the Indian leaders whom he met, Montagu was very much impressed with a former anarchist, a close friend of Aurobindo Ghose and his brother Barindra, Bijoy Chatterjee by name. Originally a believer in violence, and an associate of bomb throwers, he later became a moderate congressite. He told Montagu that "in the main the so-called anarchists would be far, far easier to get on our side (Government side) than the extremists in the Congress. The extremists in the Congress were mere wind bags who loved agitation and denunciatory speeches. They were also Conservative in politics, believing in keeping the Brahman influence in tact and the other classes subject to them." Chatterjee pleaded the cause of those young revolutionaries who were still in British

121. SRO, MTA, Delhi, 22 January 1918.

122. Ibid, 18 February 1918.

prisons. Though they were seditionists who made bombs their weapon, yet they were the 'real social democrats, the men who want reform on Western lines'. "It is they who go into a house to carry out and burn the corpse of an 'untouchable'; it is they who go about among the depressed classes, nursing them in cases of plague and malaria, when nobody else will touch them . . . They murdered policemen in order to discourage the police from interfering with them; they committed dacoities in order to raise funds for their propaganda."<sup>123</sup> Montagu was told that if the British policy could be reoriented to make partnership and not subordination as its keynote, these young revolutionaries of India 'will see the error of their ways'. Montagu thought of winning them over for the future stability of the empire; but to Chelmsford, they were guilty of bloody crimes and it was absolutely absurd to think of any negotiation with them.

On 22 February 1918, Annie Besant came to see Montagu with her proposals. She knew the report on the reforms was getting ready. She pleaded that when the report was out and the Press took it up for criticism, they should not be punished for their free opinion. Montagu assured that if the criticism was done decently and if she herself did not arouse public sentiments against the officials, there was no reason to fear any punishment. Next, she complained about the condition of the internees, and of the physical torture to which people were subjected, and wanted his intervention. When Malaviya came with his proposals, Montagu had a long discussion with him and tried to form an opinion of that leader, knowing as he did his hold on his countrymen. "He was very nice," he noted, "very conciliatory, fully understanding that if Indians opposed our scheme we should never get it through, because the Anglo-Indian community would say,—'We object to it and the Indians do not want it'. I assured him that we would be ready to consider any amendments, but they must not be coupled with abuse of the civil service. I like him very much. He is so earnest; he seems to be so good. It is difficult to believe what everybody here tells you,—that he is a snake in the grass

123. SRO, MTA, Delhi, 21 February 1918.

and absolutely untrustworthy. I feel that they do not handle him the right way.”<sup>124</sup>

Montagu had a long discussion with Jinnah. The latter was more interested in the proposed structure of the Government at the Centre, and not so much with the local Governments. He knew that some degree of responsibility was coming to the provinces, but his chief concern was to ascertain the actual powers that were coming to the hands of the people at the Centre. Montagu knew that those powers for the time being, were going to be very limited. But, he held out the hope before Jinnah that future would see more and more of power being vested in the Centre. Tilak wanted to avail of the opportunity of travelling with Montagu in the same ship to discuss in detail his line of approach; but disappointment awaited him since Montagu's date of departure did not coincide with his own trip to England.

While talks were being held in India to promote her constitutional status, in England, there was no optimism about, and encouragement to the reform proposals. It was a matter of painful surprise to Montagu that his mission should be taken so lightly and looked at so suspiciously. His opponents in England were critical of his earlier 'caustic and not very well-informed criticisms' of the British rule in India before he assumed the office of the Secretary of State. To them, it was because of those earlier pronouncements that his declaration of 20 August 1917 gave rise to exaggerated expectations throughout India. As he was travelling through India and meeting people, it appeared to many Conservatives that he was 'lowering the high office of Viceroy in the eyes of the Indian politicians', while at the same time, 'stimulating a very dangerous agitation throughout India'. It was already a known fact that India was seething with discontent, and that revolutionary ideas were slowly permeating a wider circle of people. Mutinous symptoms were seen even among a number of Indian regiments. Dangerous movements, supported by educated classes, were in the offing. In view of growing uncertainties, Montagu's Indian adventure was regarded as harmful to British interests.

124. SRO, MTA, Delhi, 27 February 1918.



While Montagu was still in India, Gandhi was experimenting with the power and potentiality of Satyagraha as a means of resisting injustice anywhere or in any form. 'Two such experiments were conducted during the Ahmedabad mill-hands' strike of February-March and the Kheda Satyagraha of March-April 1918'.<sup>125</sup> The ultimate objectives of those experiments were known to the alarmed authorities who were fully aware of Gandhi's achievements in South Africa. He represented the rising tide of a new-type radicalism which frightened the old-fashioned bureaucrats; also Gandhi's style of speech and action clearly became a puzzle to many of his English contemporaries who, nevertheless, came to dread him more as they understood him less.

Amidst growing anxieties from all corners, an optimistic Montagu was still struggling hard to give India some kind of a constitution, however limited in content. But as his labour was nearing its end, the Viceroy wanted to claim his share of the credit as a co-author of that great scheme. "I cannot describe the weariness of my flesh," noted Montagu impatiently, "I am tired of conciliating, cajoling, persuading, lobbying, interviewing, accommodating, often spoiling my own plans to quell opposition first from Basu, then from Nair, first from Mayer and then from Vincent, all the time with the patient, meek, weary-looking Viceroy contributing nothing. I do him wrong! This morning he brought a contribution to the Report, not only from his own brain, bless him, but in his own handwriting. What a treasure! I should like to have it lithographed and incorporate it in the document! It is written in blue pencil on foolscap paper; it covers exactly 1½ pages, and it deals with what? Something that will thrill the whole of India!; a concession that will set men thinking him so strongly that it ought at least to be acknowledged that it is his authorship!"<sup>126</sup> No less bitter was his feeling towards the home authorities who did not express any appreciation of his labour in India. In his annoyance he expressed a feeling which reveals, as if, the inner purpose of his Indian exercise,

125. CW, vol. XIV, Preface.

126. SRO, MTA, 28 February 1918.

namely, to keep India quiet as long as possible during the most crucial and uncertain moments of the War. A secondary purpose might have been to grant some constitutional concessions when there was so much popular clamour for them. Montagu wrote:

"It may be that I am losing my patience; that I am a little bit sore that the Government, on whose behalf I came, as a member of which I have been working night and day, has never sent me, in answer to my telegrams, one little line of encouragement. If I have failed, what have I done? I have kept India quiet for six months at a critical period of the War; I have set the politicians thinking of nothing else but my Mission. I have helped the Government of India, day in and day out, in the discharge of their ordinary functions. That I have done, and if everything else fails I think I am entitled to some message of encouragement."<sup>127</sup>

Burdened with conflicting ideas, and the rough sketches of his report on the reforms ready, Montagu at last left India at the end of March 1918. He was going home with the knowledge that his proposals would be unacceptable to many Indian leaders and even to many among the British administrators. He also had the apprehension that the proposals would be unacceptable to many in England, and many in Parliament. There was a lack of understanding in every quarter. His contempt for the Viceroy and his colleagues, his intense dislike for the local administrators and bureaucrats prompted him to conclude that with 'small minded' men and 'short-sighted idiots' running the Indian Government, there was no hope for improvement in Indo-British relations.<sup>128</sup>

The War had entered its final phase. There was bad news from the Western front. On 2 April 1918, the British Prime Minister warned the Viceroy of the danger of War on the frontiers of India. In the last week of that month the War Conference met in Delhi with the Indian leaders participating in its deliberations. It was unfortunate that men like Tilak and other extremist leaders were not invited to attend. Gandhi at

127. SRO, MTA, 28 February 1918.

128. Ibid, see the accounts of the last days of his mission.

first hesitated, but ultimately joined the Conference. As the Viceroy noted: "Gandhi on his arrival in Delhi announced his intention of absenting himself from the Conference on various high moral grounds e.g., the Ali brothers, our secret treaties with Russia and Italy and so forth. I had a long conversation with him supplemented by Maffey afterwards which brought him into line and he made a brief utterance at the Conference avowing his intention to do his best."<sup>129</sup> Gandhi's line of approach was that if the Indian people wanted the benefits of British connection, they must help defend the empire. To some leaders, the assurance of an unconditional co-operation was a blunder, and representing that line of thought, Khaparde moved the following resolution:

"This Conference recommends that in order to evoke whole-hearted and real enthusiasm amongst the people of India and successfully to mobilise the man-power and material and money the Government of England should without delay introduce a Bill into Parliament meeting the demands of the people to establish Responsible Government in India within a reasonable period which should be specified in the Statute. We feel confident that the inauguration of this measure will make our people feel that they are fighting for their Motherland and for the defence of their own rights in an Empire in which they possess the same status as other members thereof; and we are further sure that if the imagination of our country is captured and its enthusiasm so encouraged it can easily equip itself to be in the language of the Premier 'the bulwark which will save Asia from the tide of oppression and disorder'."<sup>130</sup>

All attention was on Montagu in England. In India, it was already a subject of speculation and criticism that things were moving very slow and that the Secretary of State was no more his former self full of enthusiasm and courage. The Indian Press, even though under several restrictions, expressed critical views about Government intentions. To cite an instance, the *Bombay Chronicle* wrote on 18 June 1918: "Unfortunately, however, things are shaping themselves in a way hopelessly

129. MCC, Mss. Eur. D 523/7, Chelmsford to Montagu, 29 April 1918.

130. Ibid, Enclosure, Khaparde's Resolution.

injurious to the interests of the Empire, in special reference to India under the unwise guidance of the War Cabinet, and, obviously, the Secretary of State, who whatever his original impulses, very shortly after his arrival in this country became a pitiable prey to the machinations of the bureaucracy, Anglo-Indians and Sydenhamites, found himself incapable of acting with that dignity and responsibility befitting a Minister of the Crown at this critical juncture, and is apparently a tool in the hands of those who are exerting so baneful an influence upon him since his return to his place in the Cabinet.”<sup>131</sup>

Lord Chelmsford did not stop giving advice to the Secretary of State on behalf of the official community as the Scheme was being given its final shape. “It would be out of keeping with the Oriental mind to cease asking for more than it expects to receive, and Indians will continue to keep up their extravagant demands until the last moment,” wrote Chelmsford to Montagu.<sup>132</sup> He reported home how Tilak and Besant and their followers were strongly against the Scheme, and how the moderate elements were making efforts to rally their forces in favour of reforms.

In England, Montagu faced a serious challenge from men like Lord Sydenham. He was criticised for handling the question of reforms in an irregular and unfortunate manner, like the wrong handling of the Irish question. His conduct was also discussed and also the manner in which the Reform Scheme was being worked out. In the past, when the Government of India drew up schemes of reforms, they were discussed by the Secretary of State and his Council; next, the Cabinet considered them; and finally, they were submitted to the judgment of Parliament. “Instead, in this case,” complained Sydenham, “the Viceroy and the Secretary of State have signed one of the most controversial documents ever issued, and then the public is asked to discuss it.”<sup>133</sup> Montagu was taken to task for toeing the lines of the small Home Rule Party in India and for entering into a bargain with them on the basis of ‘No

131. *Bombay Chronicle*, 18 June 1918, Letter to Editor.

132. MCC, Mss. Eur. D 523/7, Chelmsford to Montagu, 13 July 1918.

133. PP, Lords, Lord Sydenham on Indian Constitutional Reforms, 6 August 1918.

Home Rule, no man-power' to help the War efforts. "The little band of Home Rulers saw their opportunity, and so also did the Germans who have done all they could to raise trouble for us in India."<sup>134</sup> The Montagu Report was described as a concession to a denationalised intelligentsia. It was also pointed out that the extremists were vehement in their protest against the proposals, and therefore, the Report stood on an uncertain foundation. Tilak's reaction to the Report was quoted in Parliament: "It is entirely unacceptable and will not satisfy anybody. It is only a miserable cheese-paring measure proposed in the interests of the bureaucracy, whose vested interests must always remain adverse to our aspirations."<sup>135</sup> To the Marquis of Crewe the whole adventure was 'a leap in the dark, as all great proposals for reform must be'.<sup>136</sup> Lord Harris requested the Lords to remember what Queen Victoria had advised long ago: "In India you must go slow; go slow."<sup>137</sup> "Surely, therefore," argued Lord Lamington, "in the interests of the great Indian people we are bound to proceed cautiously."<sup>138</sup>

Lord Islington, the Under Secretary of State for India, while supporting the Montagu Report, felt it necessary to inform the Lords about India's latest War support so that the Lords might desist from criticising the reform proposals when the War was still on. "Before 1914 the recruits enlisted annually in India were 15,000; last year the enlistment of combatants—apart from others—was 285,000. This year it is hoped that 500,000 will be raised in addition to the 1,000,000 who have already joined the ranks for the War... The expenditure on War material in India is £2,000,000 a month, under the conduct of the Indian Munitions Board... I mention this because it is a fact which claims at the hands of the people of this country and of the Dominions and of

134. PP, Lords, Lord Sydenham on Indian Constitutional Reforms, 6 August 1918.

135. PP, Lords, see Debates on Indian Constitutional Reforms, 6 August 1918.

136. PP, Lords, Marquis of Crewe, 6 August 1918.

137. Ibid, Lord Harris, 6 August 1918.

138. Ibid, Lord Lamington, 6 August 1918.

Parliament most serious recognition.’’<sup>139</sup> He pleaded that the report itself was in an incomplete shape at that time, and when it was completed, Parliament would have an opportunity to discuss it and make it ‘a sound revised Constitution for India’. It was obviously a play for more time, and, a plea to maintain truce till War came to an end. Lord Curzon made the intention of the Lords clear by saying: “There are also important sections of community in India, such as the Moslem Community, who have not yet pronounced. There are many persons in India very suspicious of what is called Brahmanical rule, who are entitled to be heard. In this country there are important associations, bodies, and so on, who in the course of the next three months will acquaint us with their views, and it can only be after full examination of all these expressions of opinion that the Government will come properly charged to an examination of the case.’’<sup>140</sup>

Montagu’s disappointment knew no bounds as he understood the principle on which the criticism was being made, namely, ‘the wickedness of relaxing British control over Indian affairs, the horror of giving Asiatics control of their own country’, and similar other dogmas. Similarly, his patience was at a breaking point when he came to realise the inevitable delay to which his countrymen subjected the reform proposals unmindful of the extremist opinion about it. The War situation in the meanwhile was vastly improving, and the military authorities felt assured by August 1918, that the period of anxiety was, at long last, over. Taking that into consideration, the British statesmen were in a position to twist the reform proposals to stretch them in communal directions. In disgust, Montagu complained to the Viceroy on 22 August 1918:

“There seems to me to be an alarming growth of opinion in this country in favour of Communal Representation. Chamberlain and Islington are both infected by it. I trust that your Government and the Electorates Committee will give it its quietus, but there is no doubt about it that the people who believe in the *divide et impera* policy are at the bottom

139. PP, Lords, Lord Islington, 6 August 1918.

140. Ibid, Lord Curzon, 6 August 1918.

of the movement. It looks so colourable to ensure that all sorts of people get represented. I cannot help thinking that it owes its origin to people who object to our schemes, who regard opposition as useless and who hope to stultify them by so great a congeries of minority representatives that the electorate will have no coherent whole and will therefore not be formidable.”<sup>141</sup>

It was not difficult for the Indian leaders to understand the intention behind either the delaying tactics or raising the communal issues. The Montagu Report was already complicated and controversial. To some moderates, it was worth giving it a trial. But to the extremists, its rejection appeared the only proper course. Even, before the report was published, one section of the extremists rejected it as unacceptable just because it came as a gift from the foreigners. Just after its publication, others came out openly to condemn it as worthless. ‘Mrs. Besant condemned the proposals as unworthy to be offered by England or to be accepted by India. Mr. Tilak was not far behind her in pronouncing the Scheme to be entirely unacceptable.’<sup>142</sup> Some moderates were hesitant in accepting it in its entirety, and they wanted time to understand its complex character. Some others like Dinshaw Wacha and Surendra Nath Bannerjea thought it necessary to accept it as a step towards Responsible Government. Amid such contradictory approaches, the National Congress once again came to a point of a split. Finding themselves in an advantageous position, and also in a majority in the Congress organisation, the extremists started making arrangements to hold a special session of the National Congress. It met in Bombay at the close of August 1918. Syed Hasan Imam presided over it. Among other resolutions the Special Session of Congress passed the following:

“That this Congress declares that the people of India are fit for Responsible Government and repudiate the assumption to the contrary contained in the Report on Indian Constitutional reform.”<sup>143</sup>

141. MCC, Mss. Eur. D 523/2, Montagu to Chelmsford, 22 August 1918.

142. IOL, SW 24/1917-18, no. 54.

143. INC, Resolution III, Special Session, Bombay, August 1918.

Further, while appreciating the earnest attempts of Montagu and Chelmsford, and recognising that some of the proposals constituted an advance on the existing condition, the Congress denounced some other proposals as 'disappointing and unsatisfactory' and offered suggestions for modifications.

A majority of the Congress moderates did not attend the special session. The Government, in its turn, felt bold to encourage the moderates and to ignore the extremists, and at the same time, to propagate the merits of the proposed reforms in unequivocal terms. The sight of victory was a reassuring factor. Much of the Indian criticism at that time could be viewed without any serious concern.

In India, the critics of the Montagu-Chelmsford report were divided on which of the two authors the real blame should go to. According to some, the Secretary of State was 'the villain of the piece; the Viceroy his unhappy victim'. To others, 'a sympathetic Secretary of State has been enmeshed in the net of the cold hard bureaucracy and has consented to proposals far short of those he would otherwise have advocated'. Rejecting such criticism, and aware of the moderate sympathy for the report, the Viceroy held out a hope for India by announcing the substance of the proposed constitution:

"Let me now sketch in broad strokes our scheme, as I see it," he said. "In the domain of the Government of India the fundamental principle is laid down that its authority must remain in essential matters indisputable. That is basic. But consider the advance which, subject to that principle, we propose. An Assembly, in the main elected, infinitely more representative of India than the Council as now constituted. An Assembly before which all business will normally be brought; able to express its opinion and exert its influence in respect of all matters pertaining to the Government of India. And if the Government through the Council of State retains its present power to make its will effective, the use of that power is conditioned. It can only be exercised on the certificate of the Governor-General in Council that the matter in issue is in the interests of peace, order and good government.

"Surely no one can say that this scheme does not involve a large increase in the influence of the representatives upon the



actions of the Government of India.

"I turn next to the domain of the Provinces. Here we come upon the division of functions of Government into the two categories of Transferred and Reserved Subjects. This division has been the object of much criticism, but I doubt whether the wit of man can devise any other device whereby the progressive transfer of responsibility can be secured.

"Now what advance is secured in this domain? In the sphere of Transferred Subjects, the will of the Legislative Council is in the main to prevail. But even in the sphere of Reserved Subjects, the development is marked. Here, too, the will of the Legislative Council is normally in the main to prevail . . . Thus, in the domain of Provincial Governments the immediate advance is immense, and the road forward lies open and defined."<sup>144</sup>

Only two months were now left for the War to end. While happy tidings came from the Western front, from Palestine, and from North-West Frontier, the internal resentment arising out of scarcity, rising prices, currency questions and oppressive rule, darkened the prospects of the approaching peace. In England, the sight of victory after a period of unprecedented gloom, made the leaders complacent about Indian developments and they felt no urgency to push the Montagu-Chelmsford report towards its constitutional shape. Moreover, during the debates in the House of Lords in October 1918, critical and hostile opinions were expressed regarding the proposed concessions. The promise of the Secretary of State, as contained in his famous declaration of 20 August 1917, had become almost a forgotten fact. Prudent Lords now wanted that in view of the enormous post-War problems, the constitutional developments in India should not be hastened through. Montagu wrote:

"India is really not a crystallised fruit. India is not a stuffed bird. The constitution of India is really not a perfect piece of architecture which one must not disturb. It is the instrument of Government of a living and progressive country

144. CP, Mss. Eur. B 216, The Viceroy's Speech in Imperial Legislative Council, 4 September 1918,

and you cannot always be looking back over your shoulder in veneration of the past.”<sup>145</sup>

In any case, the new constitution was not to come up for implementation in 1918. Parliament and the British nation were in a different mood in those decisive moments of history. On 7 November 1918, Montagu wrote to Chelmsford: “Perhaps at the very moment of writing hostilities have ceased . . . If you want any other cheering news, it is that it is our Empire which has won the War, our Empire which defeated Turkey, our Armies which have done most of the decisive fighting on the Western Front during the last two years, our Navy which has been fundamental to victory.”<sup>146</sup> There were lurking suspicions in the mind of the Secretary of State that in those euphoric moments of triumph the British statesmen might either indefinitely delay or totally neglect the Indian questions. England itself was poised for far-reaching political developments. Post-War problems were undoubtedly going to be stupendous in their magnitude. Montagu, therefore, thought it essential to secure a clear assurance from the Prime Minister that whatever happened, he must go on ‘with the intention of carrying our Reform Policy’. In view of the serious changes in the internal politics of Britain, Montagu wrote to the Viceroy about the prospects of their joint venture and their policy of liberalism:

“You may be sure that I will not lightly abandon this prospect of bringing our ship to harbour. On the other hand, for it I may be called upon to make sacrifices greater than I can make. Asquith has hoisted a party flag and the old Liberal Party in which I was brought up, in which I thoroughly believed, appears to me to be dead. It looks as if I shall become a member of a so-called Coalition which consists of the whole Conservative Party, a few Liberal Members disowned by their organisation, and a few Labour Members repudiated by the Labour that they represent. This does not matter, but Liberal principles will, thank goodness, survive.”<sup>147</sup>

145. MCC, Mss. Eur. D 523/2, Montagu to Chelmsford, 22 October 1918.

146. Ibid, 7 November 1918.

147. Ibid.

On the night of 11 November 1918, the Viceroy received the news that the War had at last come to an end with victory for Great Britain and her allies. At once, on behalf of India, he sent a telegram to His Majesty tendering 'India's deep and heartfelt devotion to the Throne'. Next morning, the King-Emperor sent back his reply: "The struggle now so happily ended has demanded unprecedented sacrifices from us all, and in responding to the call upon her men and resources India has played a part worthy of her martial qualities and high traditions. She has fulfilled my faith in her single-minded devotion to my Person and Empire, and she has vindicated my confidence in her loyalty."<sup>148</sup> The Viceroy, while celebrating the victory at Simla on 12 November 1918 declared: "For four years the fortunes of battle have ebbed and flowed, but the Empire has remained constant to their pledge, and to-day we can sheathe the sword knowing that we have kept the faith. But what of India? She has played a great and noble part in the struggle. She was early in the field helping to stem the rush of the Teutonic hordes, and she has been in at the end, and her troops largely contributed to the staggering blow in Palestine which first caused our foe to totter to his fall."<sup>149</sup>

Within three days of the Armistice, Parliament took up the Indian affairs for discussion. The Members knew that throughout the War the censorship was in operation and hence news from India was much too scanty. Now that the War was over, the Indian issues demanded an open discussion. Communal riots, seditious activities, extravagant demands, threats to law and order, and disloyal utterances were the items Parliament had to discuss and digest. On 14 November 1918, Lord Sydenham brought before the House of Lords these subjects for discussion. He said: "The questions of India are of supreme importance to the whole Empire, and if we continue to ignore them we shall before long be faced with the most unpleasant surprises. In September last there were prolonged riots in Calcutta and in Madras, and in the former place

148. CP, Mss. Eur. B 216, see Viceroy's Address at Victory Celebration at Simla, 12 November 1918.

149. Ibid.

there was considerable loss of life. In Calcutta a meeting was called by certain Mahomedan leaders who disagree with the policy of the Moslem League, which, as we all know, was captured by the Hindu extremists. All over India there is a certain amount of Moslem unrest due to the Report of the Viceroy and the Secretary of State. That Report is regarded by Mahomedans generally as having dealt too lightly with their interests.”<sup>150</sup> The Lord referred to the revolutionary activities in India during the War, and to the disloyal attitude of the national leaders towards the authorities. He demanded urgent attention to such developments and the Under Secretary of State for India assured the House:

“Most careful consideration must obviously be given to the question of the precise form of the special powers with which Government should be equipped, and I have no desire to prejudice the decision; but it is imperative that the authorities should retain at their disposal means adequate to cope with a situation which presents unusual features, which the ordinary law is not framed to meet, and one that will ensure reasonable security and safety to the people entrusted to their care.”<sup>151</sup>

A jubilant Lord Curzon, overwhelmed by the prospects of a victorious peace, presented an Address of Congratulation to the King-Emperor, saying how the curtain had at last descended on one of the most stupendous dramas of history, how at length the British Flag was flying over a more powerful or a more united Empire than ever before. “My Lords,” said Curzon in a poetic style, “a little more than one hundred years ago our great romantic poet, looking on the birth of a new Hellas, wrote these prophetic words—

‘The World’s great age begins anew,  
The golden years return;  
The earth doth like a snake renew  
Her winter weeds outworn;  
Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam  
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream’.

A similar vision now rises above a far wider horizon.”<sup>152</sup>

150. PP, Lords, Lord Sydenham, 14 November 1918.

151. Ibid, Lord Islington, 14 November 1918.

152. Ibid, Lord Curzon, 18 November 1918,

The King-Emperor, in his reply, while referring to India, declared: "I shall ever remember how the Princes of India rallied to the cause, and with what ardour her soldiers sustained in many theatres of War and under conditions the most diverse and exacting, the martial traditions of their race."<sup>153</sup>

Did the people of India also deserve profuse thanks and congratulations as did the Indian princes and the army? By their action, the authorities seemed to be moving in a direction to create among the population grave suspicion and mistrust. India was being pulled out of an era of hopes and thrown at the threshold of disappointment.

Within a short time after the War, the Indian leadership came under a spell of, what was described in official terms as, a 'new Ultra-Left Wing attitude'. The rise of a group of moderates to prominence by their support to the Montagu-Chelmsford Scheme was viewed by the extremists with great displeasure. The latter, therefore, became more determined in their opposition to the scheme and proceeded to overwhelm the National Congress by their influence during the ensuing session. The extremist philosophy found favour with the politically conscious Indians because of the contents of the Rowlatt Report which aimed at curtailing much of the Indian freedom in view of the popular discontent. Political trends took a radical turn. Even the followers of Annie Besant and the Home Rule champions now looked like conservatives in comparison to the newly awakened political ultras. For the first time, the authorities were startled to see involvement of masses in political issues, and their readiness to support radical doctrines as also their desire to take part in active movements. The base of political activities was no longer narrow, and the number of political men was no more within manageable limits.

The politically conscious Muslims, too, were becoming more anti-British in their attitude at the end of the War than at any time before. They moved closer to the Congress ultras in their bitterness against the Government. It was the uncer-

tain future of the Caliph after Turkey's defeat in the War which had inspired the Indian Muslims to this course of action. Loyalty towards their spiritual head and consideration for his temporal interests weighed heavily on the Muslim mind than their regard for the British rulers. The role of the Indian Muslims thus became a matter of grave concern for the authorities.

Amid these quick developments the National Congress met in its thirty-third session in Delhi in the closing days of December 1918. It presented a radical posture both in its composition and character. The delegates who numbered nearly five thousand included among them one thousand sturdy agriculturists from rural areas. Together with a large number of women, many in veils, they made the session look more like a gathering of the common people. Speeches in English language were discouraged as the people were keen to know what their leaders were saying.

The Congress demanded the immediate removal of the Defence of India Act, Bengal Resolution III of 1818, Bombay and Madras Resolutions of 1819 and 1827 respectively, the Press Act, the Seditious Meetings Act, the Criminal Law Amendment Act, and all other repressive measures which sought to curb the liberty of the people. "As the War is over now, the Defence of India Act too which was essentially a piece of war legislation, should be repealed without any further demands on the part of the country," declared Ajmal Khan.<sup>154</sup> The Montagu-Chelmsford Scheme was subjected to severe criticism as inadequate and insufficient, and a resolution describing it as disappointing and unsatisfactory was passed by a large majority. Demands were advanced for full and immediate provincial autonomy. "Everywhere one-man rule is out of date. Oligarchy is entirely out of date. Democracy is the only present aspiration and is the present word with which to charm in this world," said G.S. Khaparde.<sup>155</sup> In view of the declaration of President Wilson, Lloyd George, and other statesmen that future peace of the world depended on the

154. CC, Address of Ajmal Khan, Delhi, December 1918.

155. CC, Address of G.S. Khaparde, Delhi, December 1918.

principle of national self-determination, the Congress passed a resolution that, "This Congress claims the recognition of India by the British Parliament and by the Peace Conference as one of the progressive Nations to whom the principle of Self-Determination should be applied."<sup>156</sup>

Britain and India stood, with the rest of the world, at the crossroads of history as the Great War came to an end. The hopes for better relations between the two countries, in the light of their co-operation during the long years of the War, to usher in an era of co-operation in a new constitutional setting, were soon belied. While Britain got ready to face a new India with newer methods of repression, India prepared herself for an era of struggle with greater vigour and with newer methods. The end of the War was quickly followed by the beginning of India's determined fight for freedom.

156. INC, Resolution XI, December 1918.

## Conclusion: A Prelude to Struggle

THE end of the First Great War also signalled the end of the Indo-British co-operation and a prelude to Indo-British confrontation of a momentous character which, with occasional intermissions, continued till the end of the British rule. The history of that struggle will form the subject of the next volume.

When the Indian statesmen did not oppose the continuous flow of men, money and materials to meet the needs of the empire during the period of the War, it was a foregone conclusion of many of them that the reciprocation in helping India in meeting her political needs was an imposing duty on the British rulers. It was not a reward which Britain had to offer, but an obligation which it was imperative for her statesmen to discharge. The Indian expectation was at times expressed overtly and directly. For example, a man like M.K. Gandhi, when he was asking his countrymen to go to fight in France or Mesopotamia, made it clear that, "We are not entitled to demand Swaraj till we come forward to enlist in the army . . . The half a million men whom we shall raise will go with love of Swaraj in their hearts. When they come back, they are bound to get Swaraj."<sup>1</sup> Gandhi did not conceal his feelings.

1. CW, vol. XV, Gandhi's Speech at Surat, 1 August 1918.



Others who did, also knew that India's gains at the end of the War would indeed be substantial.

On the British side, men like Montagu were foresighted enough to understand the signs of the time and to prepare to meet the situation with prudence and wisdom. The constitutional measures which he so earnestly wanted to introduce foreshadowed a realistic appreciation of the hopes and desires of a vast population, led by great parties and great persons. In the Englishmen's understanding of constitutional evolution, the steps towards responsible Government in India were being taken through the demands loudly advanced and concessions slowly conceded, through long years no doubt, but with tangible results, however meagre. Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms were already in sight. Many were hopeful of the political progress of India in the ensuing post-War era in the light of the perceptible political developments in the West. Things were shaping in their own way when there came an unexpected turn, originating from comparatively a minor matter, but engulfing at once the entire national politics, and paving the ground for a mass upheaval.

It began with the British apprehension of India's possible post-War revolutionary tendencies. During the War, there were many weapons in hands of the Government to suppress sedition and anarchism, such as, the Defence of India Act, and Regulation III of 1818, etc. All those were drastic and severe enough to suppress disloyal activities. But the home authorities decided to improve and perfect the methods of dealing with dangerous situations and thought of appropriate measures in that regard. The old repressive Acts had long been regarded in India as odious, offensive and hateful, and there had been persistent demand for their repeal. It was obvious, that the people were not prepared to tolerate their continuance after the War. The authorities therefore wanted something new by which the old could be replaced. To justify this intention they advanced an excuse that the new measures would be better than the old ones in the sense that there would be some guarantees to the individual that the powers would not be misused. It was evident that the Government did not consider the ordinary laws of the land, as they existed before

the Defence of India Act was passed, as sufficient and reliable to cope with the problems which were likely to arise at the end of the War. They dreaded the post-War peace in India more than the War-time unrest.

It is ironical that the British Cabinet entertained these ideas even while expressing their desire to grant India constitutional reforms. Repression and Reforms were, as if, the inseparable needs of the empire. The Cabinet went by the evidence that there was in India a small body of men who were the sworn enemies of the English race and of the British Government, and who were prepared for hostility at any time and at any pretext. They were the real and avowed revolutionaries and any government was bound to feel worried and afraid. They were beyond the pale of negotiations or reform talks, and far from any lure of concessions or compromise. It was because of those men of real revolutionary instincts and anarchical philosophies that dangerous conspiracies were spreading to different parts of the empire and to remote corners of several provinces. Revolutionary ideas were seen entering homes, schools and colleges. Tight secrecy was maintained on the activities of the individuals or of groups who worked against the Government. Law-abiding citizens would not dare disclose their movements. Police officers, approvers, and witnesses were at times murdered before they could harm the revolutionaries. These conditions prevailed before and during the War, but they were expected to spread after the War.

The German involvement in Indian revolutionary activities was very much suspected during the long years of the War. But investigations showed that the Indian revolutionaries were in no need of external inspiration or material help. "Germany's greatest disappointment in this War has been India," declared the British Prime Minister in April 1917. "She expected sedition, distraction, disaffection, disloyalty, and the forces of Britain absorbed upon the task of subduing it. What did she find? Eager, enthusiastic, loyal help for the Empire."<sup>2</sup> Germany's expectation of an Indian revolution during the War

2. Speech of British Prime Minister at the Guildhall, 27 April 1917.

was justified. But her active support to encourage that revolution came nearly to nothing. Yet, the fear of the German gold and of German agents continued to alarm the British for long. A new source of dangerous inspiration was also in sight. It was the Russian revolutionary and his stupendous success in destroying the Tsarist regime.

In the context of what the Indian revolutionary was at the time of the War, and what he was likely to be at the end of the War when the general discontent of the people was very much likely to grow because of numerous factors, the Cabinet wanted to plan in advance, and thought of appointing a committee to study the character of the Indian sedition movement and suggest remedial measures to face future dangers.

This Committee contained Mr. Justice Rowlatt, a Judge of the Supreme Court of Judicature in England, the English Chief Justice of Bombay, an Indian High Court Judge from Madras, a non-official Indian lawyer of high standing, and an experienced member of the Indian Civil Service. The timing of the Committee's activities was rather unfortunate. In January 1918, when the Imperial War Cabinet was eloquent and vocal about India's great contribution to War and her remarkable services, and in March 1918 when the War Conference met in India under gloomy news from the Western fronts to call upon the princes and people of India for a renewed pledge of help and succour, the Rowlatt Commission was sitting to ascertain the character of the Indian sedition and how best to deal with that. Against all the welcome prospects of the time, namely, the Montagu mission, the hopes raised by reforms, the sight of victory, and the bliss of peace, the Rowlatt Commission appeared as the most evil omen. It could have possibly done its work earlier, or later, without drawing the nation-wide attention, but not at that particular time when the nation was impulsive enough to suspect its *bona fides*.

In due course the Commission issued its Report. In no time, the Report was transformed into a Bill. But when it was presented to the Imperial Legislative Council, its real tragedy began. It was carried by the vote of the official Members against the vote of unofficial Members. The question that at once arose was: though the Indian members in absolute unani-

mity in the Viceroy's Legislative Council had said that they did not want that Act, was it wise on the part of the Government to carry it further? For whom was the law when every single Indian Member in that supreme Legislature had cast his vote against it? And, what validity did that Law have as Law except that it was an order passed by the Viceroy and his bureaucracy? A much greater issue captivated the people's imagination—should a country accept a Law lying down when its representatives had said 'No' to it in their collective wisdom!

The Rowlatt Law became the issue of the hour, pushing out of focus other issues of whatever importance. The opposition in the Legislative Council turned into opposition throughout India. It was described as the most lawless law ever passed into law. In essence it was seen that any man could be put in prison if the area was proclaimed as under the Rowlatt Laws. In its still more precise substance, it was seen as a law against the entire nation.

The Viceroy's arguments in support of the Rowlatt Laws did not satisfy the people. "The sudden release from restraint and control of the forces of anarchy would involve a position which we cannot contemplate. The reaction against all authority which has manifested itself in many parts of the civilised world is not likely to leave India entirely untouched and the powers of evil are still abroad. We cannot shut our eyes to the undoubted existence in India of definitely revolutionary organisations . . . In the difficult days that lie ahead the established forces of law and order—the forces to which the people are from childhood accustomed—need all the support that comes from the co-operation of the great body of sober-minded citizens."<sup>3</sup> The Viceroy tried to please the people by saying that he did not have any anxieties from the side of the Indian masses, 'for each year I have spent here has strengthened my confidence in the solid good sense of India as a whole'. He also wanted to convey that he did not believe that India should fall a victim to the influence of Bolshevism. "The poison of that doctrine flows from failure, and I am convinced that those nations who have drunk the tonic of

3. CP, Mss. Eur. B 216, Lord Chelmsford's Speech, 6 February 1919.

success with the consciousness of duty done are immune from its virus.”<sup>4</sup> He further tried to repudiate the idea that the Rowlatt Bill was a slur on India’s good name. Only a small section of the community was going to be affected by it, and that too, only in the interest of the security of the life and property of the rest of the people, argued the Viceroy. The country, however, was not willing to be influenced by the justification he advanced.

The moment called for either a solution to the Rowlatt issue, or a show-down over it. For a victorious Britain, in that hour of prestige, weakness on any issue was inconceivable. For an awakened India, the Rowlatt Law was an act of betrayal and ingratitude, and an insult to the honour of the nation to be assailed and fought out. With the growing resoluteness on both sides, the course of history took its natural turn as the *Zeitgeist* demanded of it, and in its inscrutable way history put forth a man to take up the leadership of the Indian nation in a manner which perplexed the British and shook the empire to its foundation.

Gandhi’s rise to power and prominence was sudden and spectacular. Many Indians did not know of his South African adventure and of the success of his movement there. During his passive resistance struggle in the Transvaal, 2,700 of his countrymen received sentences of imprisonment under his guidance to uphold the honour of their country. Many of those men, poor and humble, ordinary traders and workers, without education or consciousness, even unable to think or talk of their country, ‘braved the horrors of gaol-life’ and some of them ‘braved them again and again rather than submit to degrading legislation directed against their country’. Gandhi had taught them to fight and suffer, but not to surrender to injustice. ‘Many homes were broken in the course of that struggle, many families dispersed, some men at one time wealthy, lost their all and became paupers, women and children endured untold hardships.’ Narrating Gandhi’s achievements in South Africa and describing him as a ‘wonderful personality’, Gokhale has spoken of him as early as 1912:

4. CP, Mss. Eur. B 216, Lord Chelmsford’s Speech, 6 February 1919.

“He is without doubt made of the stuff of which heroes and martyrs are made. Nay more. He has in him the marvellous spiritual power to turn ordinary men around him into heroes and martyrs.”<sup>5</sup>

Gandhi's political outlook as he returned to India at the close of 1914 was to work to strengthen the ties between India and Great Britain 'by each giving of its best to the other'. In the thick of the War, his support to the British was in accordance with this principle. His policy was criticised, and his actions were not approved of by many Congress stalwarts. When controversy about his War efforts reached its climax, he gave the following explanation to Tilak in his usual straightforward manner:

“My view is that if all of us take up the work of recruitment for the War and enlist hundreds of thousands of recruits we can render a very great service to India. I know that Mrs. Besant and you do not share this view. The Moderates also will not take up the work earnestly. This is one thing. My other point is that we accept the substance of the Montagu-Chelmsford Scheme, explain clearly the improvements that we wish to be made in it and fight till death to have these improvements accepted. That the Moderates will not accept this is clear enough. Even if Mrs. Besant and you accept it, you will certainly not fight in the way I wish to fight. Mrs. Besant has declared that she is not a satyagrahi. You recognise satyagraha as (only) a weapon of the weak. I do not wish to get caught in this false position. And I do not wish to carry on an agitation in the Congress in opposition to you both. I have unshakable faith in my own formula. And it is my conviction that if my *tapasya* (spiritual discipline) is complete, both Mrs. Besant and you will accept my formula.”<sup>6</sup>

Gandhi wrote this in August 1918. It was clear that his approach to the thorny issues of that time was somewhat different from those of others, and his political language indicated something of a new fervour and a deep zeal for some unusual course of action if and when necessary. He was deter-

5. CW, vol. XI, Gokhale's Speech in Bombay, 14 December 1912.

6. CW, vol. XV, Gandhi's Letter to B.G. Tilak, 25 August 1918.

mined to move in his own way, unmindful of what the authorities or the anarchists, the extremists or the moderates, or anybody else, thought of or talked about. It was to this unusual man that India was perhaps beginning to look up for some new direction in those unusual hours of history. As the subsequent developments showed, India's destiny was in the hands of that man as he stood up against a power which he came to regard as unjust.

The Rowlatt Law gave Gandhi a chance to prove his mettle. He went through all that the Government had to say in justification of that measure. He felt disappointed at the attitude of the Viceroy. He felt that all the Indian Members in the Legislative Council should better leave the Council. He was surprised to learn that when the authorities were told of the possible massive agitation against the Rowlatt Bills, Sir George Lowndes, the Law Member of the Government of India, said with disdain that the Government were not afraid of the agitation. "He is right," wrote Gandhi to Madan Mohan Malaviya. "Even if you held a hundred thousand meetings all over India what difference would it make? I am not yet fully decided but I feel that when the Government bring in an obnoxious law the people will be entitled to defy their other laws as well. If we do not now show the strength of the people, even the reforms we are to get will be useless. In my opinion you should all make it clear to the Government that so long as the Rowlatt Bills are there you will pay no taxes and will advise the people also not to pay them. I know that to give such advice is to assume a great responsibility. But unless we do something really big they will not feel any respect for us. And we cannot hope to get anything from people who do not respect us."'

Gandhi knew what he was talking about. And, he meant what he said. The responsibility of urging a vast population to action was stupendous. Unless the author of that call was sure of his own strength to shoulder the burden, he was bound to invite serious adverse consequences. To Gandhi, his immediate step was always of prime concern. He

7. CW, vol. XV, Gandhi's Letter to Madan Mohan Malaviya, 8 February 1919,

was not worried about what the future had in store for him or his country. The attitude of the authorities towards the Rowlatt legislation so provoked him that he decided upon his own step, unconcerned with the questions and doubts which disturbed other leaders. If the Government was so stern on a comparatively minor issue, what liberalism should India expect from it in bigger matters of constitutional advance? Gandhi felt stirred to the very depths and decided not to watch the progress of that hated legislation, but to act against it. He said:

“To me, the Bills are the aggravated symptoms of the deep-seated disease. They are a striking demonstration of the determination of the Civil Service to retain its grip of our necks. There is not the slightest desire to give up an iota of its unlimited powers and if the Civil Service is to retain its iron rule over us and if the British commerce is to enjoy its present unholy and privileged position, I feel that the Reforms will not be worth having. I consider the Bills to be an open challenge to us. If we succumb we are done for. If we may prove our word that the Government will see an agitation such that they have never witnessed before, we shall have proved our capacity for resistance to autocracy or tyrannical rule.”<sup>8</sup>

Gandhi made an assessment of the situation and quickly decided on the course of action to be adopted. If petitions and resolutions carried no weight, and if protests in the Legislative Council carried no weight, and if nation-wide mass meetings had no effect, what other alternatives could there be to make the Government respect the popular opposition to its measures? To Gandhi, the ordinary rough and ready course was an armed rebellion. But, with non-violence as his political creed, he would not think of it for a moment. The only course, therefore, which he thought as legitimate and sound, was the ‘Civil disobedience to all the laws of the land or to a selection of them’. Gandhi however, continued to think if the Rowlatt Bills were but a stray example of a lapse of righteousness and justice, and if that be so, he would not mind their implementation. But, evidence was too massive to prove that they were the product of ‘a determined policy of repression’.

8, CW, vol. XV, Gandhi to V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, 9 February 1919.



Left with no other choice, Gandhi thought of civil disobedience as a duty of all men who respected personal and public liberty. Peaceful obedience to the laws of a Government that was capable of 'devilish legislation' seemed to Gandhi immoral and wrong, and developing a doctrine of his own to face the power of the rulers, he issued a call to those who agreed with him to join in the struggle. A call from Gandhi went out to the entire nation to take the following Satyagraha pledge:

"Being conscientiously of opinion that the Bills known as the Indian Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill No. I of 1919 and the Criminal Law (Emergency Powers) Bill No. II of 1919 are unjust, subversive of the principle of liberty and justice, and destructive of the elementary rights of individuals on which the safety of the community as a whole and the State itself is based, we solemnly affirm that, in the event of these Bills becoming Law and until they are withdrawn, we shall refuse civilly to obey these Laws and such other Laws as a Committee to be hereafter appointed may think fit and we further affirm that in this struggle we will faithfully follow truth and refrain from violence to life, person or property."<sup>9</sup>

Gandhi pleaded with the Government that the Rowlatt Bills would seriously harm the Reforms Bills which were then in the final stage of completion. Without the success of the Reforms, the Government and the country were most likely to face unknown disasters. His fundamental point was that even the most autocratic government owed its power to the will of the governed. Without a recognition of this principle, all political reforms would be without value. In a telegram to the private secretary to the Viceroy on 24 February 1919, he conveyed his decision 'to offer Satyagraha and commit civil disobedience'.<sup>10</sup>

The step he was going to take, according to Gandhi, was 'probably the most momentous in the history of India'.<sup>11</sup> He assured the nation that he had not taken that drastic decision hastily. He was prepared to believe that there might be

9. CW, vol. XV, The Satyagraha Pledge, 24 February 1919.

10. NAI, Home, Political-A, March 1919, no. 250.

11. *Bombay Chronicle*, 1 March 1919.

sources of secret violence, confined to isolated and very small pockets, and to a microscopic minority of people. In the name of such persons, the Government wanted to impose on the whole nation the repressive Rowlatt Law, and wanted to arm itself with power out of all proportion to the situation sought to be dealt with. He was painfully aware that the British absolutely ignored 'the historical fact that the millions in India are by nature the gentlest on earth'. Gandhi made a last appeal to the Government: "Even at this eleventh hour I respectfully ask his Excellency and his Government to pause and consider before passing Rowlatt Bills. Whether justified or not there is no mistaking the strength of public opinion on the measures. I am sure Government do not intend intensifying existing bitterness. Government will risk nothing by delay, but by expressly bowing to public opinion will smooth down feeling and enhance real prestige."<sup>12</sup>

Lord Chelmsford had seen the bitterness which the Rowlatt legislation aroused in his Legislative Council. Yet, he underestimated the intensity of public anger. Secondly, he took Gandhi's threats lightly and hoped to see opposition to his agitation from various quarters. "There is a nucleus of reasonable people led by Sastri and Bannerjea and the counterblast issued by them against Gandhi's manifesto is having a good effect in the country," he felt. The Viceroy made an assessment of Gandhi's role and wrote to the Secretary of State on 12 March 1919:

"Meanwhile Gandhi is committed to a course of opposition along lines of passive resistance the scope of which is not yet defined. I had a long talk with him the other day, but as he had issued his manifesto before coming to Delhi no particular result could be expected from the interview. He is honest and sincere but has his vanities and is attracted by the chance of repeating his South African successes on the Indian stage. His personality always insures his getting a large following, but I think his visit to Delhi may have shaken him to some extent as he found Government friendly and sympathetic and the

12. NAI. Home, Political-A, March 1919, no. 250, Gandhi to the Viceroy's Private Secretary, 11 March 1919.

Indian legislators by no means unanimous. However, he will find it hard to withdraw without making a splash of some kind and we can only wait and see."<sup>13</sup>

It was perhaps wrong on the part of the Viceroy to adopt a policy of wait and see after Gandhi had threatened action while he was still negotiating with the highest authorities for a solution. Chelmsford's letters show that he failed to grasp the meaning of the Gandhian movement clearly. He did not think that his adversary had chosen his ground well. India was not South Africa, and the Government of India was certainly much more powerful than Gandhi could imagine. Moreover, Gandhi who was talking of rigid self-restraint in action, did not know that India was full of young hot-headed men who might be led to violence to discredit his work. And, if violence came, the arm of the Government was strong enough to crush it. Gandhi, on his part, announced the nature of his forthcoming struggle in the most honest but ardent manner that 'our creed requires us to eschew all violence and to resort to truth and self-suffering as the only weapons in our armoury'.<sup>14</sup>

Gandhi, in his own way, wanted to draw a comparison between the Western and Eastern approach to higher ideals and faith in moral force. President Woodrow Wilson in his famous speech delivered to the Paris Peace Conference at the time of introducing the League of Nations Covenant had said: "Armed force is in the background in this programme, but it is in the background, and if the moral force of the world will not suffice, physical force of the world, shall." Contradicting this faith, Gandhi declared to his followers: "We hope to reverse the process, and by our action show that physical force is nothing compared to the moral force, and that moral force never fails."<sup>15</sup> Sir William Vincent, on behalf of the Government of India, had declared that yielding to the threat of satyagraha 'would be tantamount to complete abolition of the authority of the Governor-General-in-Council'. To him Gandhi's reply was:

13. MCC, Mss. Eur. D 523/8, Chelmsford to Montagu, 12 March 1919.

14. CW, vol. XV, Gandhi's Speech on Satyagraha, Madras, 20 March 1919.

15. Ibid.

"This movement is undoubtedly designed effectively to prove to the Government that its authority is finally dependent upon the will of the people and not upon force of arms, especially when that will is expressed in terms of satyagraha. To yield to a clear moral force cannot but enhance the prestige and dignity of the yielder."<sup>16</sup>

"I think he is trying to frighten us," reported Chelmsford to Montagu describing Gandhi as a 'bluff'. "In any case no other course is open to us. The fact is he has got passive resistance on the brain and cannot suppress it any longer. We can congratulate ourselves that he has not chosen his ground better. I am quite happy in defending my present position."<sup>17</sup>

So at last, the real struggle began. The peace which followed the Great War in its world setting did not prove itself a bliss in the Indian context. Multitudinous factors which had operated in direct and indirect form in fostering animosity between India and Britain, at last culminated in a popular upsurge of an unprecedented character against which the Government was ready to fight its battle. "Gandhi, as you will have seen," reported Chelmsford to Montagu on 9 April 1919, "has inaugurated a passive resistance movement as a reply to the passing of the Rowlatt Bills. Unfortunately there was an affray at Delhi in which a crowd which was committing acts of violence was fired on with certain fatal results . . .

"Dear me, what a d . . . d nuisance these saintly fanatics are! Gandhi is incapable of hurting a fly and is as honest as the day, but he enters quite lightheartedly on a course of action which is the negation of all government and may lead to much hardship to people who are ignorant and easily led astray."<sup>18</sup>

He comforted the home authorities that the Government of India was capable enough to see through its own affairs and that there was nothing to worry. But within days the British were face to face with an insurmountable popular insurrection which, once initiated, was destined to run a long course. The Gandhi era in modern Indian history had begun.

16. CW, vol. XV, Gandhi's Speech on Satyagraha, Madras, 20 March 1919.

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